TRANSFORMATIONAL HOPE: THE PROPHETIC MINISTRY OF JESUS AS A BLUEPRINT FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

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The focus of the ministry research educated participants on the holistic and missional nature of evangelism necessary for equipping leaders and laity to engage the community in transformative ways resulting in community development and the revitalization of the ministry context. A qualitative study was implemented utilizing a mixed method of pre- and post-questionnaire, pre-and post-Adult Hope Scale survey, a book study, video presentations, and journaling. It was hypothesized that if participants are educated about the spiritual principles of evangelism, they will be equipped to help the ministry context create evangelism plans to implement within the surrounding community.

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DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to the loving memory of my late grandmother, Emma (Ma) Ford Dudley. You left a legacy of love, faith, family**,** and education that continues to inspire me to succeed. I love and miss you dearly.

ABBREVIATIONS

NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NIV	New International Version
KMCC	Kingdom Movement Community Church
SGM	Social Gospel Movement
CCMP	Church and Community Mobilization Process
EWC	Executive Worship Committee

INTRODUCTION

In his book *Reclaiming Rural: Building Thriving Rural Congregations,* Allen Stanton illustrates how the local church can be a powerful agents of hope and transformation in their communities by "engaging in the practice of evangelism as community development."[1] Stanton goes on to explain that community development evangelism can be "any number of activities that improve life within the community whether through directly improving people's economic conditions or health or by supporting initiatives that add cultural enrichment."[2] Stanton adds,

> Understanding community development as evangelism can help achieve at least three meaningful goals. First, it provides a framework for rural congregations to reengage in their communities and live into our biblical mandate to make disciples. Second, it grounds our understanding of community leadership in a theological practice, ensuring that our theological convictions are foundational to what we practice. Third, it provides a way to practice evangelism, which is a necessary theological practice.[3]

An evangelistic approach to community development recognizes the challenges and possibilities unique to rural ministry contexts that often lack adequate resources and limited access to resources. In an article entitled "Reaching and Revitalizing Rural America: Overcoming Misconceptions, and Answering the Call: Part Three," Ed Stetzer

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[1] Allen Stanton, *Reclaiming Rural: Building Thriving Rural Congregations* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2021), 47.

[2] Stanton, *Reclaiming Rural*, 54.

[3] Stanton, *Reclaiming Rural,* 81.

affirms, “In smaller communities that lack essential resources, the local church has the opportunity to be the church in a way that is highly relevant and deeply needed. Christians belongs in the space of need and desperation because we carry a message of hope that is vitally needed in those contexts.”[4] As “anchor institutions,”[5] churches are called and uniquely positioned as stakeholders to “contribute to the “social and economic fabric of the community left devoid by the absence of other anchor institutions like hospitals, businesses, banks, and universities.”[6] Standing in community resource “gaps,” the church can be hope and good news in places of desperate need. Through engaging and collaborating with the community, the church positions itself to offer relief through ministries like job fairs, after-school tutoring, farmer’s markets, and other community development initiatives.

The possibilities of evangelism as a meaningful form of community development are what inspired this research project. Coffeeville, Mississippi, like many rural towns, suffer from the absence of anchor institutions and limited socio-economic resources that are necessary for communities to thrive. Believing that the church could do more in and

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[4] Ed Stetzer, “Reaching and Revitalizing Rural America: Overcoming Misconceptions and Answering the Call: Part Three,” Ed Stetzer Mission Group Blog, https://edstetzer.com/blog/reaching-and-revitalizing-rural-america-overcoming-misconceptions-and-answering-the-call-part-3.

[5] In an article entitled “Anchor Institutions and Their Significance to Community and Economic Development, David Maurrasse explains what anchor institutions are and their importance to resource deficient areas. He expounds, “Anchor institutions are universities, hospitals, and other enduring organizations that play a vital role in their local communities and economies. They tend to remain in their geographical settings, even as conditions change around them. Therefore, they are vital assets to their neighborhoods, towns, cities, and regions. Increasingly, anchor institutions are expected to do more in their communities, and become active civic participants in improving health and well-being in their surroundings.” In many small rural locations experiencing decline and distress, churches are anchors institutions and often contribute significantly to the community’s sustenance and vitality. David Maurrasse, “Anchor Institutions and Their Significance to Community and Economic Development,” Columbia Climate School, https://news.climate.columbia.edu/2016/03/08/anchor-institutions-and-their-significance-to-community-and-economic-developoment/.

[6] Stanton, *Reclaiming Rural*, xi.

for the declining and distressed Coffeeville community, I designed this research project to be a community engagement, involvement, and community development strategy by educating and equipping leaders and laity about the spiritual principle of evangelism. The hypothesis that guided my research was if the project participants are educated about the spiritual principle of evangelism, then they will be equipped to help the ministry context to create a plan of evangelism to implement with the surrounding community. Once clear on understanding evangelism as a spiritual principle, I believed that the church would be able to strategize, create, and implement holistic ministries that would lead to the revitalization of the context and surrounding community.

Before proceeding, I must explain what I mean by evangelism as a spiritual principle. For me, evangelism as a spiritual principle means several things. First, it means reestablishing evangelism as a fundamental ministry and mission of the church. The Great Commission makes it clear that evangelism is not optional for the church, and as believers, we are to "go therefore and make disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28:19, NRSV). However, shifting attitudes toward the church and evangelism has created an evangelism crisis. A Barna Group report describes this evangelism crisis as an "erosion of evangelism," where "a majority of practicing Christians does not consistently support evangelism, and 47 percent of Millennial Christians believe it is flat out wrong to evangelize."[7] The data surrounding evangelism's current state suggests Christians overwhelmingly no longer see the need or importance of evangelizing. This project expects to counter this narrative by educating the participants on the purpose and power of evangelism to reestablish evangelism as a central focus of the church.

[7] Barna Group, "Reviving Evangelism, Current Realities That Demand a New Vision for Sharing Faith," Barna, https://www.edusc.org/uploads/images/reviving-evangelism_995.pdf.

Second, understanding evangelism as a spiritual principle, calls for redefining evangelism to include expanding on the traditional view as verbal proclaim only. In *Evangelism: Theological Currents and Cross-Currents Today,* David Bosch admits, "One of the problems with evangelism is that it is understood differently by different people."[8] Allen Stanton also agrees that "evangelism is understood in multiple ways, but often within our contemporary culture, it often corresponds closely with proclamation."[9] A traditional view of evangelism diminishes it to verbal proclamation to unbelievers aimed at individual salvation, but biblically, evangelism is not and/or. Evangelism is both/and to include proclamation and demonstration; word and deed that is multidimensional is scope.

In *A Theology of Evangelism*, William J. Abraham argues that evangelism should be "construed as a polymorphous ministry aimed at initiating people into the kingdom of God."[10] Correctly understanding evangelism as multidimensional includes understanding evangelism as a form of community development. In his article "From Person Evangelism to Community Engagement," Zach Below states the following:

> First and foremost, we have to begin making it very clear that evangelism is more than a personal endeavor. It is more than a verbal presentation of the Gospel. It is also the long game, taking time to build presence and relationships and letting the world see what grace, peace, joy, and celebration look like. It is the collective people of Christ being Christ in their community.[11]

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[8] David Bosch, "Evangelism: Theological Currents and Cross-Currents Today," *International Bulletin of Mission Research* (July 1987), Sage Journals, https://doi.org/10.1177/239693938701100301.

[9] Stanton, *Reclaiming Rural,* 47.

[10] William J. Abraham, "The Heart of the Matter," *Interpretation* 48, no. 2 (April 1994): 118, https://doi.org/10.1177/002096430004800202 (117-130).

[11] Zach Below, "From Personal Evangelism to Community Engagement, Missions and Outreach," Refresh the Church, https://refreshthechurch.com/personal-evangelism-community-engagement/.

Last, understanding evangelism as a spiritual principle means evangelism is holistic in scope and missional in approach. Evangelism is holistic in that it seeks to address and transform the whole of humanity (spiritually, mentally, psychologically, socially, politically, and economically). A missional approach speaks to understanding God sending the church to be missionaries in the world and or local context. Darrel Guder, who is considered one of the pioneers of the church missional movement explains "mission in not merely an activity of the church. Rather, mission is the result of God's initiative, rooted in God's purposes to restore and heal creation. 'Mission' means "'sending'" and it is the central bible theme describing the purpose of God's actions in human history."[12] To understand God as a "missionary God" means to also understand the church as a "sent people."[13] As God sent Jesus, Jesus and the Holy Spirit sends the church (John 20:21, NRSV). Mission is not limited to what the church does overseas or in foreign territories. It is a call to impact and represents God wherever God has placed the church. This project hypothesizes that if participants are educated about the spiritual principles of evangelism, they will be equipped to help the ministry context create a plan of evangelism to implement within the surrounding community.

In chapter one, I provide a ministry focus that highlights the chosen trajectory ordained by God for my life. More specifically, this chapter provides my ministry journey's historical, geographical, demographic, and educational aspects and highlights how they intersect with the current ministry context. This chapters also begins to develop a theme and hypothesis for the research project.

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[12] Darrel Guder, *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 4.

[13] Guder, *Missional Church*, 5.

Chapter two explores Luke 4:16:21 as the biblical foundation used to undergird and support thesis of creating and implementing a plan of evangelism for the ministry context. This chapter examines Jesus' life through prophetic and missional lens as a blueprint for holistic evangelism. The life and ministry of Jesus present evangelism as an instrument of hope and a tool of help (liberation and transformation).

Chapter three examines the Social Gospel Movement as the historical era relevant to creating and implementing a contextual evangelism plan. The Social Gospel Movement expands biblical evangelism to include individual and societal salvation. It also establishes societal and community engagement and involvement as aims of the church. The church has a spiritual and social responsibility to address societal sins and their social consequences. In addressing sinful systems, structures, and their consequences, the local church can provide ministries that aid in revitalization.

Chapter four establishes Liberation Theology as the theological foundation of the research project. Liberation Theology reveals God's desire for all people, especially the poor, the least, and the last, to be liberated from all forms of oppression that limit the full expression of humanity. Starting from Moses leading the exodus out of Egypt to the liberating sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, liberation is a consistent theme throughout scripture. This chapter explores the relationship between liberation and transformation and the church's role in this dynamic.

Chapter five investigates how the interdisciplinary field of Community, Transformational Development, and the Hope Theory supports and enriches the overall effectiveness of the research project. This chapter establishes the churches' vital role in community life and well-being and how the church is best positioned to facilitate

transformation and revitalization (community development). The Hope Theory is relevant to the project because it describes hope as a spiritual virtue and a measurable science that can be measured, lowered, and raised. Inspiring and instilling hope in hopeless contexts is often the first step in creating change.

Chapter six details the analysis and findings of the research project. The analysis includes lists of the methodologies or researched instruments used, how the project was implemented, a summary of the learning section, and charts and graphs to support research findings.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

When a church is intentional about evangelism and discipleship, spiritual renewal and life changes take place. Revival starts in the church, but it should not be confined to the church. Through evangelism and discipleship, revival should extend into the community creating an environment conducive for revitalization. Using evangelism and discipleship as catalysts, I will further explore and describe how my ministry interests and skills align with the needs of my context. Additionally, I will use the insights gained from the relationship between my ministry skills, interests, and the needs of my ministry setting to develop the basis for a Doctor of Ministry Project. Lastly, I will begin to develop a theme and hypothesis to form the foundation of my doctoral project.

The synergy chapter will include several components which highlight the chosen trajectory ordained by God for my life. More specifically, this chapter highlights a historical and geographical section that provides the history and geography of my journey. There is also a demographic and educational component that provides insight that leads to my current educational experience as I pursue the Doctor of Ministry degree. Further, there is a component, which highlights the ministry journey that intersects with the current context. The chapter culminates with the synergistic energies of all components, which provides a better understanding of the godly expectations.

Discipleship and evangelism lie at the heart of Christian faith and serves as the church's primary means in converting and maturing people to be like Christ. The Great Commission states to "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you," is a call to both evangelism and discipleship (Matthew 28:19-20, NRSV).[1] Rather than being two competing spiritual disciplines, discipleship and evangelism are interrelated. Extensions of one another, Bobby Harrington and Bill Hull, rightly assert, "Evangelism necessitates disciples who have matured to the point of reproduction. Discipleship includes evangelism, and evangelism is a part of discipleship."[2] Matthew 28:19-20 calls for the fusion of discipleship and evangelism, because both are necessary to live Christ-like and to fulfill the biblical mandates presented in the Great Commission. It is possible to focus more heavily on one to neglect or omit the other. According to Tamara Christine Van Hooser, "Evangelism without discipleship leaves new converts hanging, unsure of how to live a Christian life, and gives the impression that conversion is the end goal."[3] On the other hand, discipleship without evangelism fails to mobilize the matured believers necessary to feed the ongoing work of evangelism.[4]

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[1] Biblical references are from the NRSV version unless otherwise stated, Matthew 28:19-20.

[2] Bobby Harrington and Bill Hull, "Evangelism or Discipleship: Can They Effectively Work Together," Discipleship.org, 8, https://www.discipleship.org/wp-cBontent/uploads/2016/08/Evangelism-or-Discipleship.pdf.

[3] Tamara Christine Van Hooser, "Evangelism and Discipleship," Biz Fluent, https://bizfluent.com/about-4672971-what-does-opportunity-cost-mean.html.

[4] Van Hooser, "Evangelism and Discipleship," https://bizfluent.com/about-4672971-what-does-opportunity-cost-mean.html.

Evangelism, "the spreading of the Christian gospel by public preaching or personal witness, addresses the mandate to 'Go!'"[5] Evangelism cannot be reduced or restricted to what the church does within the four walls of the sanctuary on Sunday. Rather than passively waiting on potential converts to come, the Great Commission directs believers to go into the hedges and highways, to go to the marginalized areas of society and to go to underserved communities and share the life-changing gospel of Jesus Christ. While evangelism speaks to the command "to go," discipleship, speaks to the command to "make" disciples. Discipleship is the ongoing process of "teaching biblical precepts while modeling and guiding others toward living righteously as followers of Jesus Christ."[6] The goal of discipleship is to "make" or reproduce other disciples by emulating the life and teachings of Jesus, "to make out of others what Jesus made out of them (other disciples)."[7] Both evangelism and discipleship are calls to a new life, a new way of living characterized by holistic (spiritual, mental, emotional, physical and financial) renewal and revitalization.

For churches to be impactful, effective, and transformational, they must be intentional about evangelism and discipleship. Contemporary culture has produced a "brand" of evangelism and discipleship, inaccurate and inconsistent with the Great Commission. This culture has produced a spiritual climate "where Christians and churches agree that evangelism must be done, but also agree you can be a good Christian

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[5] Google, "Definition of Evangelism," Google, https://www.google.com/search?q=evangelism&oq=evangelism&aqs=chrome..69i57j69i6013.2598j0j4&sourceid=chome&ie=UTF-8.

[6] All About Following Jesus, "What is Discipleship?," All About Following Jesus, https://www.allaboutfollowingjesus.org/what-is-discipleship.htm.

[7] Van Hooser, "Evangelism and Discipleship," https://bizfluent.com/about-4672971-what-does-opportunity-cost-mean.html.

or church and not evangelize."[8] Such a climate also produces the illusion of being a good Christian without ever becoming a disciple or engaging in the work of discipleship.

Historical Descriptions

Being raised and reared in a religious two-parent household taught me at an early age, the importance of serving and having a relationship with the Lord. For most of my life, I have been active in the church and engaged in some aspect of ministry. From singing in the choir and leading devotions as a junior deacon to accepting my call to preach, I have always had a willingness (although reluctant at times) to serve the Lord. I have been preaching the gospel for twenty years and pastoring for fourteen. For the previous eleven years, I have been pastoring at my current context, Kingdom Movement Community Church in Coffeeville, Mississippi. Like other small rural southern towns located in the "Bible Belt" of Mississippi, Coffeeville has no shortage of churches. There are nineteen churches in Coffeeville within a five to ten-mile radius, and most of these churches are traditional and affiliated with other mainline denominations. The United Methodist, African Methodist Episcopal Zion (A.M.E. Zion), Missionary Baptist, Southern Baptist, and Church of God in Christ (C.O.G.I.C.) are all denominations present in the community. Critical analysis reveals these denominational churches tend to be traditional in worship style, inwardly focused (minimal to no outreach efforts), and older congregations reluctant to change or progress.[9] Besides the C.O.G.I.C church, no other

[8] Harrington and Hull, "Evangelism or Discipleship," 8, https://www.discipleship.org/wp-cBontent/uploads/2016/08/Evangelism-or-Discipleship.pdf.

[9] This is not an indictment against all mainline denominations, but rather a general assessment of the denominational churches in the Coffeeville Community.

churches in the community openly and consistently teach or encourage the full expression of the Holy Spirit (gifts of the Spirit such as speaking in tongues, supernatural healing, praising, or shouting in the Spirit).

It is within this religious and traditional context that the Kingdom Movement Community Church was established in November 2008. The church was birthed out of my desire to create a non-denominational and progressive ministry in rural Coffeeville, Mississippi. Kingdom Movement is not only the first non-denominational church in Coffeeville; it is the first non-Pentecostal charismatic church plant in Coffeeville with an emphasis on being Holy Spirit led and progressive. As the pastor, I have adopted a contemporary approach to church, abbreviated spirit-filled worship services, praise-team led worship and a casual dress code. The name of the ministry, Kingdom Movement (with the emphasis on move), reflects the mission of the church "to move people to a more Christ-like life." Rather than being stagnant, the ministry encourages and empowers believers to continuously move or reflect growth in five areas: spiritually, mentally and or emotionally, physically, financially, and relationally. For this to be accomplished, some traditional views of church (which tend to be limiting and restrictive) must be challenged and corrected. The church is not a place you go just to fulfill weekly religious obligations or a place of momentary relief from life's challenges. It is not a place you go to get better at church (shouting, dancing, and singing). The church is and should be a place of worship, but it must be so much more. While churches should be inspirational, they should also be informational. The goal of effective ministry is not to make people shout but to cause people to shift and mature into disciples. A biblical church is a church that

empowers and equips believers to get better at life and ultimately moves or matures people in every area of their lives.

Being the first non-denominational church in the area did not come without challenges. For most and many in the area, Kingdom Movement is not like any church they had seen before. In a town full of denominational churches, the idea of a progressive, charismatic, and non-denominational church is a foreign concept to many. Kingdom Movement members do not dress like the typical church members in the community. Rather than wearing suits and dresses, people are free to worship in tennis shoes and jeans. The church is actively engaged in outreach and other ministry activities often neglected by other churches in the area. In a community with more churches than people, the church's passion for outreach is often viewed as attempts to steal members. The town has labeled the church as being a "sanctified church," which carries a negative connotation in the community outside of Pentecostal and Holiness circles.

In terms of polity and structure, Kingdom Movement is governed by a board of directors. The board of directors, which initially included Pastor Dudley, Pastor Dudley's wife and four other individuals, is responsible for setting mission and vision of the church, setting a budget including the pastor's salary, and setting the overall goals and direction of the church. The board officers are president, vice-president, secretary, treasurer and one member at large. The board is appointed and serve one-year terms. The church also has an advisory council made up of seven other senior pastors (with church plant experience) tasked with providing oversight and settling any disputes that may arise in the church. If Pastor Dudley dies or is removed from the ministry, the advisory council will provide temporary leadership to the church and appoint a new pastor. In addition to

the board of directors and advisory council, Kingdom Movement has several auxiliary boards or ministries, including deacons, deaconess and trustees. Their duties and responsibilities are set by the board of directors.

Geographical Descriptions

Coffeeville is a small rural town located in Northcentral Mississippi and encompasses about 2.2 square miles. It is one of the two county seats located in Yalobusha County, comprised of five municipalities – Water Valley, Coffeeville, Oakland, Tillatoba, and Scobey. Founded in 1834 and named after General John Coffee, Coffeeville is located near the site of a minor Civil War battle in 1862.[10] Although two major highways go through Coffeeville, minimal outside traffic comes through and interacts with the town. Before the completion of the Highway 7 Bypass, Coffeeville experienced a higher volume of traffic because it was one of the main routes leading to the University of Mississippi in Oxford, Mississippi. The bypass diverted traffic around the town, which had a negative financial impact on the community. There are no large industries in Coffeeville, but there are three small businesses that employ an estimated seventy-five people.

Kellwood Clothing Manufacturing Plant, the largest employer in the town at one time, closed in the late 1990s, which had another financial impact on the town. Most working residents now commute fifteen to thirty minutes to work in neighboring towns and cities. Coffeeville has no stoplights, one grocery store (Piggly Wiggly), two-dollar stores (Dollar General and Super Dollar), three convenience stores, and several "mom

[10] Msghn.org, "About Yalobusha County, Mississippi," Msghn.org, 2019, https://yalobusha.msghn.org/history.html.

and pop" restaurants. With one medical clinic, the nearest hospitals are 20.7 miles (twenty-five-minute drive) from Grenada, Mississippi, and 30.7 miles (thirty-four-minute drive) from Oxford, Mississippi.[11] There are no transportation services in Coffeeville, and the nearest airport is 88.4 miles (one hour and twenty-five-minute drive) away in Memphis, Tennessee.[12] Coffeeville has an elementary and a high school near the church with less than two hundred students. Kingdom Movement is also located near the Coffeeville Court House, the Coffeeville City Hall and downtown Coffeeville.

Even though Kingdom Movement is not the ideal location for a church, especially for those unfamiliar with Coffeeville, it is uniquely located between two very distinct and different neighborhoods. To the west of the church is a predominantly Caucasian neighborhood comprised of retired middle to upper-class residents. Most of the people in this neighborhood are former educators, business owners or heirs to family wealth. To the east of the church (literally across a bridge) is a racially mixed and largely underserved community. Many residents in the neighborhood are unemployed, recently released from incarceration, and are involved in illicit drug use and activity. Despite the proximity to these neighborhoods, Kingdom Movement has not been able to effectively appeal or draw many members from either of the neighborhoods for varying reasons.

Many, if not most, residents in the predominantly Caucasian community are already members of churches. For those who do not have church homes, some may not

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[11] Distance Between Cities, "Distance from Grenada, MS to Coffeeville, MS," Distance Between Cities, https://www.distance-cities.com/distance-grenada-ms-to-coffeeville-ms; Distance Between Cities, "Distance from Oxford, MS to Coffeeville, MS," Distance Between Cities, https://www.distance-cities.com/distance-oxford-ms-to-coffeeville-ms.

[12] Distance Between Cities, "Distance from Grenada, MS to Coffeeville, MS," https://www.distance-cities.com/distance-grenada-ms-to-coffeeville-ms; Distance Between Cities, "Distance from Oxford, MS to Coffeeville, MS," https://www.distance-cities.com/distance-oxford-ms-to-coffeeville-ms.

feel comfortable being a part of a predominantly African American Church. Coffeeville, like other small towns, still have segregated communities and is not immune to the lingering vestiges of racism and prejudices. One possible reason the ministry has been unsuccessful in attracting members from the underserved population is that the church has not done an adequate job engaging the pressing issues plaguing this community.

Many of the residents in this community can be described as unchurched and may not feel comfortable coming to a church building. Kingdom Movement should explore ways to interact with this population outside of worship services on Sundays and Wednesdays. Moving forward, the church should place more emphasis on reaching and meeting both the spiritual and physical needs of this community. This will be discussed in further detail later in the synergy chapter. Kingdom Movement does not have many members from the neighborhoods, but a core group of the congregation is from other neighborhoods in Coffeeville. A large percentage of members commute twenty to thirty-minutes from the neighboring towns of Grenada, Water Valley, and Oxford.

Demographical Descriptions

According to the most recent census data, Coffeeville has an estimated population of 826 residents.[13] The town has always maintained a relatively small population with a "peak population of 1,051 in 1990."[14] The racial composition of Coffeeville is 66.20 % African American, 31.27 % Caucasian, 1.97 % Asian, and 0.56 % of two or more other

[13] Census.gov, "City and Town Population Totals: 2010-2019," U.S. Census Bureau, 2021, https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/popest/tables/2010-2019/cities/totals/SUB-IP-EST2019-ANNRES-28.xlsx.

[14] Biggest US Cities, "Coffeeville, Mississippi Population History 1990-2019," Biggest US Cities, https://www.biggestuscities.com/city/coffeeville-mississippi.

races.[15] The makeup of churches in Coffeeville reflects these racial demographics. In a small town "where everyone literally knows everyone," Sunday morning worship is still segregated along racial lines. The few attempts at cross-racial worship services and cross-racial ministry efforts have been unsuccessful. Educationally, 80.8 % of the population has some ninth- to twelfth-grade education, a high school diploma, some college experience, an associate degree, a bachelor's degree, or a graduate degree.[16] The median age in Coffeeville is 36.4 years, the median household income is $28,646.00.[17]

While the population has remained stable and educational rates are on par with the national average, additional demographical analysis suggests Coffeeville is experiencing stagnancy in some areas and decline in others. With no major employers and limited resources to groceries and other supplies, Coffeeville is not an attractive location for young families who are people looking for employment. After graduating from high school, most students who go to college and get degrees rarely return to Coffeeville to reinvest into the community. Those who graduate from high school but choose to stay in Coffeeville are often underemployed or unemployed. There are also many formerly incarcerated individuals who return to Coffeeville after their release. With no job opportunities or other resources to make a living, these individuals tend to contribute to the delinquency of the community.

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[15] World Population Review, "Coffeeville, Mississippi Population," World Population Review, https://worldpopulationreview.com/us-cities/coffeeville-ms/.

[16] World Population Review, "Coffeeville, Mississippi Population," https://worldpopulationreview.com/us-cities/coffeeville-ms/.

[17] World Population Review, "Coffeeville, Mississippi Population," https://worldpopulationreview.com/us-cities/coffeeville-ms/.

In comparison, the church's demographics have some similarities and contrasts with the town of Coffeeville. About 60% of the congregation resides in Coffeeville. The other 40% of the members commute from neighboring towns, such as Water Valley, Grenada and Batesville, Mississippi. Currently, the congregation is predominantly African American with two racially mixed families. The members of the congregation from Coffeeville tend to be older in age and have retired from factory jobs where they earned a comfortable middle-class living. The 40% of members who commute to church are younger and more educated than the town or national average. Many of the members who commute to church hold bachelor's and master's degrees. One member of the church is a medical doctor, one member is a nurse practitioner, and two members are registered nurses. The church has several educators, including two consultants, a speech therapist, and an assistant principal. Kingdom Movement is an educated and financially well-to-do congregation. The financial disparity between the church and the community is glaring. One of the church's tasks moving forward is finding ways the church demographics can positively impact the demographics in the town.

The contextual analysis reveals several pressing needs of my current context. As discussed earlier, Coffeeville is a numerically, spiritually, and economically stagnant, and declining town. The lack of businesses, job opportunities, and the lack of economic and other community resources are just a few of the needs facing my context. The community also appears to suffer from a spirit of apathy or what can be described as a settling mentality. A large population of the community seems content with living lower and lesser than God intends, as revealed in scripture. With nineteen churches in a town with 862 residents, the lack or absence of churches is not the issue. However, an absence of

churches that provide holistic ministry may be contributing factors to the community's decline and stagnancy. Holistic refers to a multidimensional ministry approach that not only focuses on spiritual well-being, but it also focuses on mental and emotional, financial, physical, economic, and relational well-being. This approach to ministry reveals a demographical contrast between Kingdom Movement and the Coffeeville community.

The congregation is generally more educated and more economically stable than the average resident of Coffeeville. The goal or purpose of community-based churches should be to positively impact the community. Although Kingdom Movement is active in the community through outreach, there appears to be a disconnect between what God is doing in the church and what God is doing in the community. The disconnect between Kingdom Movement and the community may be attributed to the lack of biblical evangelism and discipleship. Evangelism and discipleship are not only keys to holistic ministry, but they serve as a catalyst for community renewal and revitalization. Evangelism and discipleship connect what God is doing in a church to what God desires to do in the community. I believe that many of the issues facing my context can be adequately addressed through evangelism and discipleship. Evangelism and discipleship are not only calls to life change, but they are also calls to revitalization and "re-imagination" to see life as Jesus intended in scripture.

Education and Ministry Journey

Getting a good education was always stressed in my family. My siblings and I always excelled in academics. One of my dad's favorite lines was, "You do not have to

go to work or pay any bills. All you have to do is sleep, eat, and go to school. Y'all better do good in school!" As a result, I always strived to succeed academically to please my family and to escape the small-town trappings of Coffeeville. Not only did I excel academically, but I also excelled athletically. I graduated salutatorian of my high school class in 1997, and attended Millsaps College in Jackson, Mississippi to play football. I did not officially accept the call to preach or experience true conversion until my sophomore year in college. I thought I was attending Millsaps College to continue my football career, but God had other plans. Millsaps, a private, Division III, Predominantly White Institution (PWI), was not my first choice nor desired choice for college, but it proved to be the best choice. Millsaps was more than a place to play football, but instead, it became a training ground and preparation for ministry. God used football as the bait to get me to Millsaps College. Football was the bait, but a guy named Alex Terry, whom we called T, was the fisherman God used to reel me in and to change the trajectory of my spiritual path.

I was one of the many people Alex led to the Lord while at Millsaps. We met during the time the calling into ministry had taken a backseat to partying and fraternity life. I pledged and became a member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Incorporated the second semester of my freshman year. I did not forget about God or the calling; I was not ready to fully surrender to the Lord. Admittedly, I was probably one of Alex's most challenging converts. Alex was a skillful evangelist and soul-winner, and these skills were often tested in attempts to break through the veneer of my quick temper, fouled mouth, and stubbornness.

I was a notorious "cusser." Every other word that came out of my mouth was laced with profanity. I depended on my foul mouth and ungodly behavior to deter Alex from his proselytizing efforts, but instead of driving him away, it drew him closer. Alex began to win me to the Lord, and I agreed to attend services at his home church. Experiencing Pentecostal worship services at St. Luke Church of God in Christ (COGIC) for the first time was a culture shock. My Methodist upbringing did not prepare me for speaking in tongues, prophesying, and dancing in the Spirit. I was accustomed to occasional shouting, but speaking in tongues, prophesying, and going forth in the gifts of the Spirit was neither taught nor encouraged at my home church. Through weekly "tarrying" services, prayer meetings, and Bible study, I began to grow spiritually. Alex put me on a collision course with the Lord. I began to realize that there was a God I had never experienced before, a God not confined to the pages of the Bible. I met a God who was tangible, present, and active in the lives of believers. I had an encounter with the Divine! I was filled with the Holy Spirit and accepted the call to ministry on my life.

I preached my trial sermon on December 19, 1999, at Moorse Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church. Using John 19:31-34 as my text, I preached from the subject, "I Know it was the Blood." God used me to deliver a powerful and anointed sermon. The Holy Spirit moved mightily, and for the first time, people were speaking in tongues and dancing in the Spirit at my home church. I did not know this was God's way of foreshadowing what was to come. I understood I had a history with my home church, but I did not know I had a future there.

After graduating from Millsaps College, I attended Duke Divinity School in Durham, North Carolina. While there, I formed some valuable professional friendships

and gained valuable ministry experience from various ministry settings. From nonprofit work in marginalized neighborhoods and hospital chaplaincy to being a student minister at a large Baptist church and a multi-racial United Methodist Church, I was equipped to be versatile in ministry. After graduating in 2004, I returned to Coffeeville, Mississippi, with no job and no idea about what was next for me. When I was not speaking at other churches, I attended my home church and assisted my pastor with worship services. This was a mentally and emotionally challenging time for me. I had spent over one hundred and forty-seven thousand dollars on education, but now I am back in Coffeeville, Mississippi, working part-time at an elementary school in Sardis, Mississippi. Unbeknownst to me, God was using my return to Coffeeville as positioning for both marriage and pastoring.

My future mother-in-law and I were working at the same elementary school. We had a great working relationship, as well as a great mother and son type relationship. One day while conversing, she informed me about her educated and single daughter. She introduced us over the phone, and we decided to meet at the church. I was sitting in the pulpit when Keenya walked into the church, and I immediately said to myself, "That is my wife." I did not need any other signs or confirmation! The Book of Proverbs declares, "He who finds a wife finds what is good and receives favor from the Lord" (Prov. 18:22). Keenya and I met on October 19, 2004, got engaged in April 2005 and were happily married on August 6, 2005.

After relocating to Mississippi after graduating from divinity school, a new bishop, Bishop Louis Hunter, Sr., was appointed to my home church conference. Seeing my potential, I received my deacon's ordination, and Bishop Hunter appointed me to

pastor Petty Memorial A.M.E. Zion Church in New Orleans, Louisiana, in February of 2005. I am thankful for the opportunity, but pastoring this church was a tremendous challenge. I learned church history, ethics, and theology in divinity school, but my seminary training did not teach me how to balance budgets or prepare me to manage people. I showed up to Petty Memorial as an eager and excited twenty-six-year-old preacher with no prior knowledge or previous pastoral experience.

When I arrived at the church, it was in numerical and financial decline. Years of inconsistent and questionable leadership had taken its toll on the congregation. The church was several months behind on the mortgage, indebted to several creditors, and had an average attendance of less than twenty people. The church edifice was infested with termites and needed substantial repairs. The air-conditioning unit also needed replacing. Once the number one church on the district, Petty Memorial, was now struggling to keep the doors open. There were times I asked myself, "Boy, what have you gotten yourself into this time?" Rather than retreat in defeat, I rolled up my sleeves and went to work. I began to teach and preach on vision. I was intentional about building relationships and strategic with outreach and evangelism opportunities. I regularly visited the sick and shut-in, started a drumline and weekly events for the youth and created fellowship opportunities for members outside of Sunday morning service. With the help of God and the help of the "faithful few" members of Petty Memorial, the once struggling church began to turn around. Midweek and Sunday service attendance increased. The tithes and offerings also increased. In a little over six months, we paid off over $8,000.00 in debt, got the bank account out of the red, and had an average of fifty people attending worship

on Sunday. Things were looking up, and we could not wait to see what God was going to do next.

I never thought that August 21, 2005, would be my last day pastoring Petty Memorial. That Sunday, ten people joined the church. The church was experiencing and enjoying a high level of success. News outlets were reporting that a major hurricane was forecasted to hit the city of New Orleans. Heeding the warning of several church leaders, my wife and I reluctantly evacuated the city on August 27, 2005. Early in the morning on August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina made landfall in New Orleans. My wife and I were at a relative's home in Mississippi, waiting out the storm. We were eager to get back to New Orleans to continue building the ministry. Thinking we would be in Mississippi for a short time, we only brought a couple of changes of clothes and a few other belongings. Like previous tropical storms and hurricanes, we thought Hurricane Katrina would turn at the last minute and spare the city from destruction. Unfortunately, Hurricane Katrina did not turn and released unimaginable devastation on the unprepared city. I remember waking up to the news and seeing New Orleans flooded.

As a young pastor, I felt helpless. The church was destroyed, and members were displaced. Communications were down, and I was unable to communicate with members of the church. Eventually, we got in contact and located several displaced members, but the storm had taken a toll on the congregation. In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, I frequently traveled back and forth between Mississippi and Louisiana, burying elderly members who did not mentally, emotionally, and physically recover from the storm. I tried to keep the congregation together as much as I could, but unfortunately, my time had come to a devastating and unexpected end. With no immediate plans from the

A.M.E. Zion denomination on the future of Petty Memorial or directions on how to move forward, my wife and I relocated to Mississippi. I left Mississippi six months earlier as an inexperienced pastor, but I returned as a seasoned and tried pastor with the stories, scars, and bruises to prove it.

While back in Coffeeville, my wife and I began attending service at my home church, Moorse Chapel. At the time, my pastor was sick, and the bishop asked me to assist him with the worship services. I was excited to be back at my home church in a ministry capacity. Unfortunately, the pastor became terminally ill and passed away November 2005. After serving briefly as the interim pastor, I received my Elder's Ordination and officially became the pastor of Moorse Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church December 2005. I was excited about this new opportunity, but I was also apprehensive. Not only was this my home church, but this was also my family church. Moorse Chapel is the church my great grandfather established in 1883; the church my grandfather purchased the land to build a new sanctuary; and the church where several of my uncles and cousins operated in some leadership capacity. How could I effectively pastor the people "who changed my diaper" or the people who knew Marcus before they knew Pastor Dudley? How would my father, who was a trustee, and my mother respond to my pastoral critiques and correction when necessary? These questions and many more were always in the back of my mind, but I did not allow these concerns to discourage or deter me from doing the will of God.

After three years of fruitful ministry at Moorse Chapel, I discerned God leading me in a different ministry direction. God had blessed the church to grow spiritually, financially, and numerically, but I kept hearing God say in my spirit, "This is not it." I

loved the A.M.E. Zion Church, but I always wrestled with my identity as a Zion Methodist. My Pentecostal experiences and influences further exacerbated this struggle for spiritual identity. I had to decide if I could be authentically me (Holy Spirit filled, tongue talking, and operating in the full expression of the Holy Spirit and gifts of God) and stay within the A.M.E. Zion denomination. After prayer and fasting, I discerned God was calling me to establish a progressive and non-denominational church with charismatic and Pentecostal influences. Just like my great grandfather, God was calling me to step out on faith. I honorably withdrew from the A.M.E. Zion in November 2008 and officially launched Kingdom Movement Community Church on November 28, 2008. The church was named after what Jesus talked about the most in scripture, the kingdom (of God).

Being the first non-traditional church plant in the Coffeeville community, I had a desire to move people to a "Kingdom" or Christ-centered life. My vison was to create "an unstoppable movement of life change in Coffeeville" exposing the community to what was possible with God. I specifically wanted to create a ministry that would literally move people: a move from membership to discipleship, a move from religion to relationship, and a move from church to kingdom. In my mind and spirit, it was time out for making good church members. The community did not need more churches or church members, but the community needed disciples "who were willing to do in others and the community what God had done in them."[18]

[18] Van Hooser, "Evangelism and Discipleship," https://bizfluent.com/about-4672971-what-does-opportunity-cost-mean.html.

Contextual and Ministerial Synergy

One of the major reoccurring themes of my educational and ministerial development is being exposed to greater, the fullness of God. To expose is defined as "to make known, disclose, or reveal."[19] Throughout the various stages of my life, God was intentional about exposing me in greater ways to combat the negative and sometimes paralyzing stigmatisms associated with growing up and living in small towns. Just as Jesus had to fight the stigma of being from Nazareth, I had to overcome the limiting and restrictive stigma of being from Coffeeville. In the person of Terrance Alexander, God used personal evangelism and discipleship to teach me that there was more to God and life than I had previously known. Through evangelization and discipleship, I was able to re-imagine who I was and to see myself through the lens of Jesus Christ.

Evangelism and discipleship are calls to re-imagination: a call to look pass the (challenges, difficulties, deficiencies, and insufficiencies) past to see the possibilities of the future. Biblical evangelism and discipleship points to the awesome new reality of the type of life possible in Jesus. Jesus declares in scripture that "I come that they may have life and have it to the full" (Jn. 10:10). It is God's intentions for believers not only to have life, but to have life to the fullest. In my doctoral project, I intend to explore how biblical evangelism and discipleship can be catalysts for community renewal and community revitalization. Evangelism and discipleship are not just what the church does, but it is the responsibility of all believers. Being exposed to the power and presence of God is a life-changing experience. People exposed to God change and changed people

[19] Dictionary.com, "Expose," Dictionary.com, https://www.dictionary.com/browse/expose.

not only change people, but they expose people to the change maker. I am a personal witness to the level of change that comes because of discipleship and evangelism.

Conclusion

In conclusion, churches serve a fundamental purpose in the community. I believe Kingdom Movement's purpose is to be a catalyst for community revival, renewal, and revitalization. By exploring and analyzing scripture, I intend on revealing how evangelism and discipleship are effective tools of "holistic ministry and life change." The community of Coffeeville is not suffering from a lack of churches, but the community is suffering from a lack of churches who are faithfully modeling the Great Commission. The theme of my doctoral project is that Christians need to practice biblical evangelism and discipleship to experience renewal and revitalization individually, corporately, and communally (as a community). My hypothesis is if people are properly educated on the importance and trained on how to biblically evangelize and disciple others, then believers will be more effective in witnessing and affecting change in the community.

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

Luke 4:14-21 will be the foundation for this doctoral project entitled, "Hopeful Imagination: The Prophetic Practices of Jesus as Models for Community Renewal." Jesus is a "Hope Dealer" – the ultimate embodiment and expression of hope. As the fulfillment of prophesy, Jesus' arrival is an affront to the conditions, circumstances, and systems that cause hopelessness and despair. Jesus does not only represent an eschatological hope, but Jesus' very presence represents a present hope. In Jesus, hope is here for the oppressed, for the sick, the imprisoned, the poor, and the blind.

Jesus embodies and exudes hope that extends far beyond theory or belief. Jesus provides tangible hope expressed in a "holistic" approach to ministry, which addresses spiritual, physical, financial, and emotional needs. The Jesus of scripture brings deliverance to the mentally challenged and demonically oppressed. He heals people from a multitude of sicknesses and diseases. Jesus miraculously feeds the physically hungry and satisfies the appetites and quenches the thirst of the spiritually hungry and thirsty. Jesus not only talks about having hope, but he also becomes the very embodiment of hope for those in distress and desperate need.

Hopelessness and despair have always been a part of human psychology. Hopelessness is described as "an emotion characterized by discouragement and a lack of hope and optimism, hopelessness often occurs when individuals experience crises,

dissatisfying, distressing, oppressive conditions, or negative life events."[1] Health epidemics and pandemics, social, racial, educational and economic inequities, unequal justice, corporate/individual greed, and corrupt political policies and practices contribute to the overwhelming sense of hopelessness and despair experienced by many. These and many other discouraging factors cause hopeless individuals to feel powerless and helpless resigned to go through life without a sense of hope for the present or the future.

The term for life without hope or the expectation of a future is despair. Charles Pinches, quoting Aquinas, describes despair as "dangerous" because it detaches us from God's story or future.[2] Pinches further suggest, "despair does not so much deny or oppose God's truth or story directly, but rather says: whatever the truth is, or whatever the story may be, there is nothing in it for me."[3] Hopelessness and despair deny a place or a part in God's story. They (hopelessness and despair) confine people to a life outside of God, which is life without possibility and a future. Consequently, the church should not only think, but also speak, and be hope in "spaces of global, communal, interpersonal, intrapsychic, and soul-full places of hurt, pain, and hopelessness." The church must be instruments of hope by rewriting the narrative of those who have allowed life's circumstances to write them off and out of God's future.[4] Hope not only connects and

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[1] Good Therapy, "Hopelessness," Good Therapy, https://goodtherapyorg/blog/psychpedia/hopelessness.

[2] Charles Robert Pinches, "How to Live in Hope: Our Place in God's Story," *The Christian Century* 134, no. 15 (July 19, 2017): 22-25, https://search-ebscohost-com.utsdayton.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rfh&AN=ATLAiGU0170724002423&site=ehost-live.

[3] Pinches, "How to Live in Hope," 22-25.

[4] Joretta L. Marshal, "Collaborating Hope: Joining the In-Between-Spaces," *Journal of Pastoral Theology* 26, no. 2 (2016): 78, https://doi.org/10.1080/10649867.2016.1247619.

keeps us connected to God's loving activities but hope also moves us forward to the possibility of a good future.

Although some view the audacity to hope in a culture characterized by "death and despair" to be "counter-cultural," the church at its core is counter-cultural. The church's call is to proclaim, produce, and provide hope that is a "genuine and tangible 'something' that invites forth a counter-narrative in a world of deep pain and desperate need."[5] To operate in hope at times is challenging and difficult, but hope is what holds us in time until we experience better alternatives and realities in God. Using Andrew Lester's definition of hope, J. L. Marshall defines hope as "a person's trusting anticipation for the future based on an understanding of a God who is trustworthy and who calls us into an indefinite future. This God keeps promises of deliverance, liberation, and salvation."[6] Hope is more than a feeling. It is a call to trusting action in God. Therefore, hope becomes a powerful tool that "holds us in time" and keeps us rooted in the reality and reliability of an omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent God.

Providing hope as a viable alternative (to pessimism, resignation, and hopelessness) is not only a spiritual task, but it is a social responsibility. Hope affirms that the "good news" of the gospel is that it is a "social gospel," a gospel committed to love, justice, and mercy. The influence of the church should extend beyond the four walls of the sanctuary and impact communities on several levels – spiritually, economically, socially, and educationally. The church has the spiritual responsibility of leading people to salvation, but the church has the equal responsibility of being visible, vocal, and viable

[5] Marshal, "Collaborating Hope," 78.

[6] Marshal, "Collaborating Hope," 80.

on social issues, economic inequality, justice disparity among minorities, and racial tensions. As "hope dealers," the church must be "holistic" and multidimensional in scope to inspire hope but to also implement applicable (spiritual) principles, practices, and affect policies that instill and ensure hope.

The "present" hope found in Jesus calls forth re-imagination – to see oneself or one's situation differently because of Jesus Christ. The dangers of hopelessness and despair dulls the sight and senses to what is possible and available in Jesus. Hopelessness and despair resign people to a false narrative that presents circumstance as inevitable conclusions, the notion that situations or circumstances cannot or will not get better or change. Second Corinthians 5:17 reveals the relationship between hope and reimaging/re-imagination when stating, "So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything has become new!" The Amplified Version of the same scripture speaks to "old things [the previous moral and spiritual condition] passing away enabling new things to come [because spiritual awakening brings a new life]." Hope casts off the restraints of impossibility and improbability and points to a new and better reality in Jesus Christ. Hope becomes the lens to rightly see oneself in the image of Christ.

The biblical foundations chapter will continue with the exegesis of Luke 4:14-21. The introduction will include an overview of the selected passage and a thesis statement. The next section will explore the literary context to gain a better understanding of how the selected passage fits logically within the overall Book of Luke. Following this, the historical, social, cultural, and religious contexts will be explored to determine if or what additional information they lend to help better understand the text. The next section will analyze the form, structure, and movement of the selected passage addressing issues

related to the genre and form of the text. A detailed analysis will be performed to examine key words, phrases, and themes. The exegesis will conclude with a summary and a conclusion of the selected passage and how it informs and affirms the doctoral project.

Luke 4:16-21 states:

> When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day as was His custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to Him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." And He rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on Him. Then He began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

Introduction

Luke 4:16-21 reveals Jesus as the Messiah and prophet "Spiritually" anointed to bring salvation, release, and relief to all. Jesus is an "accessible Savior" and a God for all people who loves justice and mercy and who transcends race, ethnicity, and socioeconomics. Jesus is the fulfillment of a prophetic promise and offers hope by "bringing good news to the poor, proclaiming release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, letting the oppressed go free, and proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Lk. 4:18-19). Jesus' "good news" of hope is both spiritual and social, present, and practical. He is concerned not only with the spiritually blind and hungry, but he is equally concerned with the socially and economically blind, poor, hungry, the marginalized and maligned. Jesus is concerned about the oppressed and the oppressor, the captives and those people and things who hold captive.

This chapter will show the connection between hope and the prophetic teaching and practice demonstrated in the life and ministry of Jesus. As the product and pastor of a small rural community, many spiritual and social factors have created a culture of hopelessness and despair in the current context. These factors have contributed to the lack of prophetic imagination necessary for "holistic" growth or vitality. If Kingdom Movement Community Church implements Jesus' model of prophetic teaching and practice demonstrated in scripture, the church will be a source of hope and a catalyst for community revival and renewal.

Literary, Social, Historical, and Religious Contexts

Luke 4:14-21 is consistent with one of the gospel's overall themes of salvation by presenting Jesus as an "accessible Savior." Jesus is the epitome of God for all people, especially the poor, oppressed, and marginalized. Luke's primary and intended audience reflects the intentional inclusivity of his narrative. The primary purpose of Luke's gospel was to present an accurate account (historically) of the life and ministry of Jesus for Theophilus (1:1-4). His ultimate purpose was to provide Theophilus with an "orderly account" so that he would be sure of what he had been taught. The Lucan prologue reveals that the writer was concerned with assuring the accounting of what followed was credible and accurate. Joseph A. Fitzmyer adds that Luke's gospel was not only written to provide assurance to Theophilus but also:

> To assure other readers like him that what the church of his day was teaching and practicing was rooted in the Period of Jesus, to strengthen them in fidelity to that teaching and practice. The "assurance" is, then, mainly doctrinal or didactic; to explain how God's salvation, first sent to Israel in the mission and powers of

> Jesus of Nazareth, has spread as the Word of God – without the Law – to the Gentiles and to the end of the earth (Acts 1:8).[7]

Luke assigns Theophilus, the original intended recipient, the title of "most excellent" (1:3). Such a designation indicates that Theophilus occupied a place of prominence, or at least a higher social status than Luke. This title appears in one other passage (Acts 26:25), which is also in Luke's writings, where Paul assigns the title to Festus, who was a Roman governor. Textual evidence suggests that Luke's intended recipient was Gentile because of how he explains certain Jewish customs and observances, which would have been readily understood by a Jewish audience.

Although initially intended for Theophilus, the Gospel of Luke appealed to a broader "group of late first-century churches of diverse social composition, which included people of different ethnic and religious backgrounds, social status, and wealth."[8] Jesus is not just the Savior of the Jews. He is the Savior of Gentiles and outsiders which Jesus alludes to in his first public sermon in the synagogue. He uses the examples of Elijah and Elisha ministering to those in need outside of Israel to serve a two-fold purpose (4:23-27): "To reveal Jesus as a prophet and the prophetic nature of his work and that his prophetic ministry will shatter traditional barriers and transgress convention boundaries benefitting outsiders."[9] Luke firmly establishes Jesus' mission to extend

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[7] Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Anchor Bible. The Gospel According to Luke* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1981).

[8] Robert C. Tennehill, *Luke: Abingdon New Testament Commentaries* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996), https://ministrymatters-com.utsdayton.idm.oclc.org/reader/978142675042.

[9] John T. Carrol, *The New Interpreter's Bible: One-Volume Commentary: Luke* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2010), https: ministrymatters-com.utsdayton.idm.oclc.org/reader/9781426735509/ #chapter3.xhtml.

salvation to all, including outsiders to Israel, the social outcasts, the economic outcasts, and the Gentiles.

Despite the "canonical placement" of the Luke and Acts in the New Testament, the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts are considered to be one book or story consisting of two volumes."[10] The two volumes were intended to be read as a continuous narrative chronicling the birth of Jesus to the birth and spread of the early church. The overarching theme of inclusive salvation is both a consistent and binding theme in Luke to Acts. Luke regards salvation as being available to everyone, without regard to gender, status, race, ethnicity, physical condition, or any other distinguishing or differentiating characteristic.

In his commentary on Luke, Darrell Bock informs "neither the Gospel of Luke nor the Acts of the Apostles names its author. A combination of external and internal evidence suggests that Luke was the author of both works"[11] Although Luke's physician status and ethnicity is debated, Luke can be viewed as "Paul's 'sometimes' companion. He is likely a medical doctor, possibly from Antioch of Syria, who is not Jewish," which would make him the only Gentile writer in the New Testament"[12] The traditional view of Lukan authorship is supported by scripture in Philemon 1:24, where Paul mentions Luke as a "fellow worker" and in Colossians 4:14, where Paul refers to Luke as the "beloved physician." Luke relied on both oral and written external sources to present his account of the life and ministry of Jesus. Luke follows the Markan plotline for large portions of his

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[10] Joel Green, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), 6.

[11] Darrell Bock, *Luke 1:1-9:50: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1994), 4.

[12] Bock, *Luke 1:1-9:50*, 6.

narrative, but he also uses source information from the hypothetical Q source (information shared by Luke and Matthew not found in Mark) and the L source (information only found in Luke).[13] Evidence suggests Luke was written sometimes after the Roman destruction of the Temple, dating it around 85 CE.[14]

Some scholars have rejected the traditional view of authorship because of inconsistencies cited in Paul's portrayal in Acts and his portrayal in the Epistles. These inconsistencies include the "number of Paul's Jerusalem journeys, Paul's accommodation to Jewish sensibilities, and differences in preaching style."[15] Scholars who reject Luke as the author find it problematic that a supposed close companion of Paul would be so inconsistent concerning critical details about Paul's life and missionary journeys. Scholars, who hold a traditional view of authorship, attribute the inconsistencies to the possibility of Luke knowing Paul but not being well informed on specific aspects of Paul's life. They also attribute these differences between Acts and the Epistles to having different themes and objectives. The remainder of this exegesis will assume Luke, the physician, and co-laborer of Paul, as the author of Luke-Acts.

Written sometime after the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple by Roman forces, Luke-Acts best fits the genre of a historical narrative, and the chosen periscope (Lk. 4:16-21) is in the form of a sermon. Providing a historically accurate account of the life and ministry of Jesus was not Luke's primary concern, but he does write his narrative with a view of history in mind. The inclusion of prologues at the beginning of Luke 1:1-4

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[13] Luke Timothy Johnson, *Prophetic Jesus, Prophetic Church: The Challenge of Luke-Acts to Contemporary Christians* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011), 10.

[14] Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997), 274.

[15] Tennehill, *Luke*, https://ministrymatters-com.utsdayton.idm.oclc.org/reader/978142675042.

and Acts 1:1-2 and other historical references and data within the overall narrative supports the designation of Luke-Acts as a historical document. These references include:

> A decree went out from Caesar Augustus (2:1); This was the first enrollment when Quirinius was the governor of Syria (2:2); In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar (3:1); Jesus, when he began his ministry, was about thirty years of age (3:23); And when [Pilate] learned that he belonged to Herod's jurisdiction (23:7); Judas the Galilean arose in the days of the census and drew away some of the people (Acts 5:37); Now Herod was angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon (Acts 12:20); But when Gallio was proconsul of Achaia (Acts 18:12).[16]

Highlighting key dates, events, and figures places Luke-Acts in the category with other historical narratives of that time.

Luke 4:16-21 occurs within the larger context of Luke's gospel labeled the "Ministry of Jesus in Galilee" (4:14-9:50). The outline of the section is as follows:

- Opening Summary (4:14-15).
- Jesus in the Synagogue at Nazareth (4:16-30).
- Growing Ministry in Galilee (4:31-5:16).
- Early Controversies with Religious Leader (5:17-6:11).
- Choosing the Twelve Disciples (6:12-16).
- Ministry Between the Choosing and the Sending of the Twelve (6:17-9:6).
- Forebodings and Predictions of the Passion (9-7:50).[17]

The segment begins at Luke 4:14 signaling the beginning phase of Jesus's public ministry in and around Galilee. It starts with an opening summary of Jesus' preparation and credentials for ministry. Baptism by John the Baptist (3:21-22), the infilling of the Holy

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[16] Fred B. Craddock, *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching, Luke* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1990), 2.

[17] Craddock, *Interpretation,* xi-x.

Spirit (3:21-22), and rebuffing Satan's temptations in the wilderness are prerequisites that have prepared Jesus for public ministry. Jesus leaves the wilderness "filled with the power of the Holy Spirit" and begins itinerant ministry in Galilee. In this segment of scripture:

> The narrative moves from promise to practice with these chapters demonstrating how Jesus, working in the arena of the Spirit, understood and engaged in his mission. This is an itinerant ministry that (1) balances proclamation and miraculous activity, especially healing, and (2) occasions a division among the people, with some supporting Jesus and coming to follow him as disciples, and others responding to him in hostility.[18]

Jesus, as Messiah, enacts God's plan of salvation to "all" through powerful teaching and prophetic ministry evidenced by miracles, signs, and wonders, which models "word and deed" ministry. His "Ministry in Galilee" ends with him preparing to journey to Jerusalem, culminating with his death on the cross.

The immediate context finds Jesus in his hometown synagogue, engaging in synagogue worship (4:16-21). The synagogue setting signals a shift in both location and activity of Jesus' ministry. He transitions from wilderness training and preparation to performing ministry in and around Galilee, which is inaugurated by his sermon in the synagogue. Jesus exchanges one wilderness for what will become another type of wilderness or hostile territory as he engages his ministry purpose. Unlike Mark and Matthew, Luke places this scene (Jesus' public teaching in the synagogue) at the beginning of his Galilean ministry as opposed to later in his Galilean ministry. While the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) says, "He began to teach" in verse fifteen, the King James Version (KJV) translates the same verse as "He taught in their synagogues,"

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[18] Walter J. Harrelson et al., eds., *The New Interpreter's Study Bible New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2003), 1860.

and the New International Version (NIV) says, "He was teaching in their synagogues." Since Jesus has already established a teaching presence in Galilee before the sermon scene, Luke's placement of the episode is both intentional and significant. Luke sacrifices chronology for programmatic themes; a literary revelatory move that "announces who Jesus is, of what his ministry consists, what his church will be and do, and what will be the response to both Jesus and the church."[19] The specific placement of this scene was an interpretive tool used to set the tone and preview the direction of the rest of Luke's gospel.

Jesus' presence in the synagogue was a normal occurrence. Luke appears to set the scene for Jesus' official "coming out" sermon by recalling an earlier episode where a twelve-year-old Jesus is found in the Temple in Jerusalem among teachers listening and asking questions to the astonishment of the crowd (2:46-47). Jesus frequented the synagogue often, because it was customary for all Jewish adult males to participate in synagogue services, which were informal and consisted of "praying, reading of Scripture, commentary (on Scripture), and benevolence for the poor."[20] Placing Jesus in the synagogue to begin his public ministry, Luke not only reveals Jesus' faithful adherence to Judaic practices and customs, but he also reveals the synagogue's significance to Luke-Acts overall narrative. More than just a place of worship, the Jewish synagogue served as a community center. Often located at the center of a community, it was a focal point for social gatherings, adjudicating justice, and learning/schooling. The synagogue was a "one-stop-shop" that modeled multidimensional or "holistic" ministry, which addressed

[19] Craddock, *Interpretation,* 61.

[20] Craddock, *Interpretation,* 61.

spiritual and social needs. Using the synagogue to launch Jesus' public ministry, Luke establishes the synagogue and later the church as the epicenter and catalyst for prophetic ministry and practice. The synagogue also appears to serve as a vital ministry model for early churches and Christian communities (as represented in Acts).

Borrowing words from the Book of Isaiah, "Jesus situates the character of his mission within the Isaiahanic hope of restoration of Israel."[21] The synagogue crowd or any devout Jew would easily recognize this reference to Isaiah as a Messianic text. Years of historical oppression and current Roman rule had created an "atmosphere of high messianic expectations" amongst the Jews. A diverse synagogue crowd comprised of the rich and poor, the oppressed and the oppressor, and the captor and captives were anticipating a messiah who would be exclusively for Israel. The exclusive Savior would usher in the kingdom of God by bringing salvation to Israel only while bringing judgment and vengeance to Israel's enemies. Amid these messianic hopes and expectations, Luke uses Isaiah to expand the messianic scope and reach of Jesus. Jesus is also a Messiah for outsiders and outcasts, and rather than bringing vengeance, Jesus brings forgiveness and peace. The salvific inclusion of others and outsiders was a point of contention for some in the synagogue and Galilee. The crowd's hostile response and their desire to kill Jesus (4:28-29) is a foreboding sign of what is to come. Opposition from religious leaders such as the Pharisees (beginning in chapter six) will ultimately end with Jesus's death on the cross.

Inserting himself into the Isaiahan text, Jesus announces that he is indeed the "Messiah," the fulfillment of prophetic promises. He supports this messianic claim by

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[21] Harrelson et al., *The New Interpreter's Study Bible*, 1860.

declaring, “The Spirt of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed for free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (4:18-19). Jesus quotes Isaiah 61:1-2 nearly verbatim with two significant modifications:

> (1) A phrase from Isaiah 58:6, ‘to set at liberty those who are oppressed,’ is added in verse 18. (2) Jesus’ second modification of the text was to cut it short. He concludes the brief citation from Isaiah with the phrase ‘to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor’ (Luke 4:19), but he omits the remainder of the sentence ‘and the day of vengeance for our God’ from Isaiah 61:2. This is quite significant. Jesus also omits the remainder of the prophecy, which includes references to Israel feasting upon the riches of the Gentiles and foreigners working in their fields. Therefore, Jesus has excluded all references of hostility to the Gentiles.[22]

Marco Hofheinz explains the significance of combining and modifying Isaiah 58:6 with Isaiah 61:1-2 by suggesting:

> Luke makes that selection and modification of the Old Testament references intentionally. He takes the promise of God’s anointed Messiah from Isaiah 61:1-2 and opens it also for the Non-Israelites (the Gentiles) and gives it, in addition, a clear social and economic focus by inserting Isaiah 58:6 with the demand of the Holy Year, the Jubilee. Luke pushes Isaiah 61:1-2 into a social and ethical direction. The poor, the blind and the imprisoned people are for Luke primarily those in social and physical need. That’s the effect of Luke’s double strategy of omission and mixed quotation.[23]

Luke’s Jesus is not so spiritually minded that he has no social, ethical, or economic concerns. Using Isaiah as the textual background and basis for his sermon, Jesus establishes: (1) that his role is messianic and prophetic in nature and fulfills an Old Testament promise (2) in the kingdom of God, everyone is welcome, including those who would be deemed outcasts and outsiders.

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[22] Paul Hertig, “The Jubilee Mission of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke: Reversals of Fortunes,” Missiology 26, no. 2 (April 1998): 168-169, https://search-eschohost-com.utsdayton.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rfh&AN=ATLA0000992019&site=ehost-live.

[23] Marco Hofheinz, “Good News to the Poor: The Message of the Kingdom and Jesus’ Announcement of His Ministry According to Luke,” *Lexington Theological Quarterly* (Online) 47, no. 1-2 (Spring 2017): 44.

Hertig's quote also helps frame how readers should view Luke's Jesus and how to interpret Jesus' interpretation of Isaiah. Viewing Jesus through the prophetic lens of Isaiah brings clarity to the identity, message, and ministry of Jesus. The use of the word "because" indicates a cause-and-effect relationship between Jesus' anointing and what Jesus is called to be and do. Jesus has been anointed by the Holy Spirit to perform a specific function. The Greek word for anointing is (chriō), which means, "(either by physically rubbing with oil or by spiritually endowing with the Holy Spirit), to assign a person to a special task, implying a giving of power by God to accomplish the task."[24]

Anointing with oil began as an Old Testament practice. People and things were anointed to symbolize designation to be used by God. Examples of this practice are found in Exodus 28:41, where God instructs Moses to anoint Aaron and his sons as priests (28:41), and in the Book of 1 Samuel where the prophet Samuel anoints David as king of Israel (16:13). The act of anointing was an outward sign of an inward reality. Robert Tennehill notes that the word used for anointed "(chriō) and the Jewish title Christos ("Anointed One" or "Messiah") are closely related and identifies Jesus as the Messiah (Christ or son of God)."[25] According to Dr. Anthony Le Donne, "Messiah is often used as an eschatological term describing Israel's hope. This hope varied depending on context, but it often included the hope for a king of Davidic lineage to redeem and recompense the Jews."[26] Luke confirms Jesus' messianic identity in a variety of ways:

> Through birth narrative, characters including Gabriel and Mary (1:30-35), Zechariah (1:67-79), an angel of the Lord who announces Jesus' birth to

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[24] Stepbible.org, "Step Bible," Stepbible.org, https://stepbible.org.html/en-27.html.

[25] Tennehill, *Luke*, 53-62, https://ministrymatters-com.utsdayton.idm.oclc.org/reader/978142675042.

[26] This quotation was taken from an email Dr. Anthony Le Donne sent to correct claim made in this paper.

> shepherds (2:9-11), Simeon (2:25-32), and the prophetess Anna (2:36-38); the testimony of John the Baptist (3:3-17), God's voice from heaven (3:23), the genealogy tracing Jesus' ancestry back to Adam (3:23-38) and Peter's confession (9:18).[27]

The legitimation of Jesus as the Messiah is significant to Luke's narrative. It foreshadows the mixed crowd's response to Jesus' messianic claim by those in attendance who could not reconcile his (Jesus) humanity and their familiarity with him being Joseph's son (4:22) with the divine nature of his claim. For those questioning, "How could these things be?" Luke goes through great details to prove that Jesus is more than Joseph and Mary's son and he is more than a carpenter. Jesus is the sent one of God anointed to fulfill a divine purpose that extends far beyond Israel and the Jews, and that is eschatological in scope.

Jesus' reference to the Holy Spirit in Luke 18:21 outlines its importance to Luke's narrative. The prominence of the Holy Spirit is a major connective theme for Luke-Acts. Luke has more to say about the Holy Spirit than any other biblical writer. Between Luke and Acts, the Spirit is mentioned over seventy times (fifteen in Luke and fifty-five in Acts). The Holy Spirit's anointing in Luke is not only a sign of Jesus' messianic identity, but it is the empowering source – the "*ru.*ach" or "pneuma" (the wind or breath of God) - enabling Jesus and others to function in ministry. According to Barry Blackburn,

> The activity of the Holy Spirit in Luke-Acts assumes three distinct stages: the period of preparation for Jesus' ministry (Luke 1:1-3:20); Jesus' ministry (Luke 3:21-Acts 1:26), and the period of the church (Acts 2:1-28:31). The activity of the Spirit links each stage with the other two, and the three stages together continue the story of God's Spirit begun in the Old Testament.[28]

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[27] Mark L. Strauss, "Reject Prophets: Jesus and His Witnesses in Luke-Acts," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Socie*ty 58, no. 1 (March 2015): 183-186, https://search-ebscohost-com.utsdayton.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rfh&AN= ATLAiBCB160506000271&site=ehost-live.

[28] Barry L. Blackburn, "The Holy Spirit in Luke-Acts: A Survey," *Leaven* 5, no. 4 (1997): 1.

In each of these stages, the role of the Holy Spirit can be summarized as "one of empowerment for witness."[29] Dr. Mark Moore draws a distinction between Luke's view of the Holy Spirit and others' view on the Holy Spirit in the Bible, specifically Paul. While Paul places emphasis on what the Holy Spirit did "in" believers, Luke highlighted what the Holy Spirit did "through" believers. Luke's Holy Spirit is an empowering agent of action, and the following chart bears this out."[30]

Table 1. Examples of Luke's Holy Spirit as an empowering agent of action

Text	Spirit Filled Person	Empowered to:
Lk. 1:15	John the Baptist	Prepare the way for Jesus
Lk. 1:35	Mary	Conceive the Messiah
Lk. 1:41	Elizabeth	Announced Jesus in Mary's Womb
Lk. 1:67	Zechariah	Prophesied concerning John the Baptist
Lk. 2:25-27	Simeon	Recognized Jesus' coming
Lk. 3:22: 4:1	Jesus	Withstand the wilderness temptation
Lk. 4:14, 18	Jesus	Preach
Lk. 10:21	Jesus	Speak with joy
Lk. 12:12	Disciples	Evangelize with boldness
Acts 1:2	Jesus	Instructed the Apostles
Acts 1:8	Apostles	Evangelize the world

[29] Mark Moore, "Luke's View of the Holy Spirit," MarkMoore.org, https://markmoore.org/index_htm_files/Holy%20Spirit%20in%20Luke.pdf.

[30] Moore, "Luke's View of the Holy Spirit," https://markmoore.org/index_htm_files/Holy%20Spirit%20in%20Luke.pdf. This is not Dr. Moore's entire chart. Some information was omitted for the sake of space and brevity. Sufficient examples were provided to show Luke's emphasis on the Spirit's role of empowering people to fulfill specific functions.

Acts 2:4, 33	Apostles	Speak in tongues
Acts 2:17-18	All people	Prophecy
Acts 4:31	Church	Speak boldly
Acts 9:31	The Church	Grow
Acts 10:38	Jesus	Perform miracles[31]

Throughout Luke-Acts, Luke displays how the Holy Spirit is the *dunamis* (power, ability, and strength) that enables effective and impactful witness for the "kingdom of God." So significant is the role of the Holy Spirit as an empowering agent in Luke-Acts, some theologians refer to Acts as "the Book of the Holy Spirit" or the "Acts of the Holy Spirit." The same Holy Spirit that "acted" in the conception and birth of Jesus (1:35) and "acted" in the birth of the church (Acts 2:1-4), is the same Holy Spirit that empowers believers to act as God's witnesses by modeling Jesus' prophetic ministry and practice of word and deed, which is not discriminative in its outpouring and filling for use.

The Book of Acts continues and advances the theme of an all-inclusive God by describing how "all of them (disciples waiting in the upper room) were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them ability" at Pentecost (Acts 2:4). In response to the diverse crowd living in Jerusalem, who were bewildered by the Galilean disciple's ability to speak the native language of all nations represented in Jerusalem, Peter declared:

> No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel. 'In the last days it will be God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy' (2:16-18).

[31] Moore, "Luke's View of the Holy Spirit," https://markmoore.org/index_htm_files/Holy%20Spirit%20in%20Luke.pdf.

The Book of Acts continues the narrative of the messianic promise to restore Israel, which now extends to all nations and people through Jesus and the Spirit-filled disciples. The promise initially made to Israel in the Old Testament and fulfilled in the incarnation of Jesus, is now fully realized by the "Acts of the Holy Spirit" in the lives of all believers.

To fully understand the broader implications of Jesus' "Spirit-filled" messianic ministry and his call to "inclusive" salvation, further examination is needed to identify what Jesus says and to whom he says it to in Luke 4:18-21. The NRSV and the New Living Translation (NLT) says Jesus is anointed to "bring the good news." The NIV says Jesus is anointed to "proclaim the good news." The KJV says Jesus was anointed to "preach the good news" (4:18). All the translations use variations of the words *kērussō* or *euangelizoma*i to describe Jesus' proclamation of the "good news." Both words are translated as to "speak, preach or announce publicly the good news of the gospel with an emphasis on the content of what is being said."[32] In the New Testament, the "good news" "always refers to the death, burial, resurrection, and witness about Jesus Christ, including its implications for humankind's relationship to God."[33] In Luke 4:18-21, the "good news" is the reversal of fortunes for the poor, outcasts, and maligned. Mary, the mother of Jesus, speaks to this reality in the *Magnificat*: "He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty" (Lk. 1:52-53). The "good news" that Jesus brings is total life

[32] Stepbible.org, "Step Bible," https://www.stepbible.org/?q=strong=G2784&options=VHNUG&pos=1.

[33] Stepbible.org, "Step Bible," https://www.stepbible.org/?q=strong=G2784&options=VHNUG&pos=1.

change and the altering of the status quo. Roy Harrisville describes the relationship between the good news of Jesus and life changes in the following manner:

> God never leaves people where he finds them. A change in condition always accompanies an encounter with the divine. Radical change is what Jesus proclaims and will perform. Jesus does not merely affirm the condition of his children. He is about the reversal of fortunes that result not just in change in one's environmental state, but in the person itself.[34]

Jesus represents ministry in word and deed; proclamation then practice that yield results. Jesus' *kērussō* or *euangelizoma*i will produce immediate outcomes of deliverance. The captives will be released. The blind will recover their sight and the oppressed will go free.

The New Revised Standard Version, the New Living Translation, and the New International Version use similar words to describe the four groups or categories of people Jesus identifies in his messianic address: the poor, the captive/prisoners, the blind, and the oppressed (4:18-19). The following are the results of each word study:[35]

> The Greek word translated "poor" (ptōchos) appears thirty-three (33) times in the New Testament, eight (8) of which are in Luke. The word literally means to be a beggar or to be in poverty. Within Luke's gospel, the "poor" are best understood as marginal, as those excluded from social and religious intercourse because of a or combination of factors related to age, economic destitution, physical malady, age, gender, or religious impurity.[36]

> The Greek word translated "captives" (aichmalōtos) occurs one (1) time in scripture and "prisoner" (NIV) (desmios) occurs 19 times in Scripture. The words mean to be a prisoner. It has been suggested that captives/prisoners in Luke's gospel include three (3) categories: "people who may have been imprisoned for debt, people with physical ailments that are regarded as the result of Satan's

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[34] Roy Harrisville, "Commentary on Luke 4:14-21," Working Preacher, https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=502.

[35] All Greek translations in the following word study will be taken from Stepbible.org unless otherwise noted.

[36] Harrelson et al., *The New Interpreter's Study Bible*, 1860.

bondage (Luke 13:16) or the devil's oppression (Acts 10:38), or those who need release from sins."[37]

- The Greek word translated "blind" (tuflos) appears fifty-two times in the New Testament and seven times in Luke's gospel. The term can refer to physical blindness (Matt. 9:27) or it can be used as a figurative representation of mental blindness (Matt. 15:14).
- The words "oppressed" (NRSV, NIV, and NLT) and "bruised" (KJV) are translated from the Greek word thrauō, which means to crush or break to pieces. To oppress is further defined as "to burden with cruel or unjust impositions or restraints; subject to burdensome or harsh exercise of authority or power."[38] The oppressed included those who were socially and economically ruined and not just those who were demonically oppressed.

To "proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" is a reference to the Old Testament Year of Jubilee or Jubilee Year. According to the Lexham Bible Dictionary:

> The Year of Jubilee is the Sabbath rest at the end of seven sabbatical annual cycles—every 49 or 50 years (Lev 25:8). During this year, economic debts were to be forgiven, land restored to families who sold in order to repay debt, and slaves sold to repay debt were to be liberated. While clearly specified in the biblical text, there is no biblical or extrabiblical evidence that the practice of a Year of Jubilee was ever celebrated. The term is only found in the Pentateuch with most references in Lev 25–27.[39]

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[37] Tennehill, *Luke*, 54-62, https://ministrymatters-com.utsdayton.idm.oclc.org/reader/978142675042.

[38] Dictionary.com, s.v. "oppress," Dictionary.com, https://www.dictionary.com/browse/oppress?=t.

[39] Lexham Press, *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), Logos Online Software, https://app.logos.com/books/LLS%3ALBD/offsets/4945?tile=left&zzls=2eMKcTcKNwrEKAjEQBX%2FDpXh1QMOOMsKdw5hZw5rCiVjCrHHDtQLCuSTCt0kOw6TDiMK%2FwrvClcOaw63DjA7CvA0rS8OxKcOCwo4GwpkiwodDw47DhzTDjxQfBcO2wrrCgVzDtSvDg1ZpbMKwNMKWN8OswoYsPsKJwq96w697N8OKVMKnSMKzwobDmBUmcRPDvsOqRcO1RcOtwpDCnsODwqnDnX1gw5bCt3BJTRzDqxAowoTDsxcNwqomasOFwr%2FCpsKqw7hbG3vCv8O1D8OZez9N.

Since there is no evidence that the Year of Jubilee was ever celebrated, Jesus represents an eschatological Jubilee. It is through him that those who believe will experience "times" of the Lord's favor – release, restoration, and redemption. After revealing his messianic identity and purpose to "bring good news to the poor, proclaim release to the captives, proclaim recovery of the sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor (which is all language that are metaphors for the Old Testament idea of Jubilee)." The text indicates Jesus rolled up the scroll, sat down and declared, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (4:21). The word "today" adds immediacy to the "good news" Jesus comes to bring. For those who were waiting for relief and recovery from oppression, Jesus' very presence signals that the wait is over. Hope is here! According to Joe Misek, "In this act, Jesus not only declared that he was the Messianic hope, but he also declared that everyone who had virtually no favor with the world would have favor with God."[40]

When responding to John the Baptist's questioning of his messianic identity while in prison, Jesus affirms his identity through the efficacy of his messianic ministry in the following manner: "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: The blind receives their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have good news brought to them" (7:22-23). The outsiders, the outcasts, and Gentiles who were previously deemed unimportant or insignificant are now priorities to Jesus. Those who previously had no place or position at God's table, are now invited guest to the kingdom of God's banquet feast (Lk. 14:15-24).

[40] Joe Misek, "God's Heart for the Oppressed, and the Gospel of Luke," Walking with a Limp, https://walkingwithalimp.net/2019/04/01/gods-heart-for-the-oppressed-and-the-gospel-of-luke/.

Amidst having difficulty reconciling Jesus' messianic claim with his Nazarene upbringing, the synagogue audience initially responded positively to Jesus' message (4:22). The response quickly turned hostile when Jesus described the full scope of his ministry. Jesus attributes some of the resentment (toward him) to "prophets not receiving honor in their hometowns" (4:24). However, Jesus' perceived neglect of his own people (in Nazareth and all of Israel) (4:23) and hanging out with sinners and tax collectors (5:29-39), are major contributors to the rejection of him and his message. Further, establishing his identity and ministry in Old Testament prophetic tradition (of justice and mercy, which will be discussed later in further detail), Jesus uses examples of Elijah and Elisha and their healing ministry to outsiders and outcasts to Israel – widows and lepers – to reveal his concern and care for the marginalized. After this stunning admission, "all in the synagogue were filled with rage. They got up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they may hurl him off the cliff" (4:28-30).

Undeterred by the premature attempt on his life, the next pericope of scripture describes Jesus leaving Nazareth, setting up his ministry base in Capernaum, and beginning to put his messianic proclamations into practice; beginning with a man who was oppressed by the "spirit of an unclean demon" (4:33-35). Following this miracle, Jesus heals Simon Peter's mother-in-law of fever, and immediately she got up and began to serve them (4:38-39). Peter's mother-in-law's response to Jesus' healing speaks to the purpose of his ministry to the blind, oppressed (socially or economically), captive (spiritually or physically) – to free or release them to serve. Here, the emphasis on healing seems to center on the demonically and physically oppressed. The text indicates

"all those who had any who were sick with various kinds of diseases brought them to him, and he laid his hands on each of them and cured them" (4:40).

Conclusion

Jesus' sermon in the synagogue (Lk. 4:18-21) illustrates the inclusive nature and character of the kingdom of God, and specifically in relation to his Messianic call. The setting of the sermon is a synagogue in Nazareth, but Jesus uses the scroll of Isaiah as a backdrop/background to expand the scope and reach of God's salvation to include the poor, oppressed, and blind captives. Prophetic in nature, the sermon confronts and corrects prevailing Jewish sentiment to those who should be included in God's salvific work. Jesus' message also addresses societal, cultural, and religious attitudes toward those maligned and marginalized by society. In the Gospel of Luke, "Society's 'have-nots' have special opportunity with God, and God's news is good first and foremost for them."[41] Jesus' concern and corresponding ministry to the marginalized is a form of God's corrective justice and a role reversal of sorts which is a theme that lies below the surface of Luke's narrative. Angelo Lopez surmises Luke's social justice appeal by stating:

> Luke gives special emphasis to issues of social justice – especially to the plight of the poor and other social outcasts – as well as to the proper use of wealth. This has made Luke's gospel a particular favorite in Christian movements like liberation theology, where Luke is viewed as an ally of those Christians committed to reforming society from the bottom up. These people are after more

[41] Misek, "God's Heart for the Oppressed," https://walkingwithalimp.net/2019/04/01/gods-heart-for-the-oppressed-and-the-gospel-of-luke/.

> than a little charity here and there. They want to completely reformulate the social structures that keep people marginalized and oppressed.[42]

The sermon also seeks to inform the poor, blind, oppressed, and captives that even though Jesus' mission is eschatological in scope, release, recovery, and redemption are present realities. Jesus validates this claim by immediately leaving the synagogue and engaging in messianic ministry. The sick are healed (4:38-39, 40-41, 5:12-14, 17:26, 7:1-10, 11:14-23, 13:10-17, 14:1-6, 17:11-19, 22:50-51), the blind recovered their sight (18:35-43), and the demonically oppressed were set free (4:31-36, 9:37-43).

Luke's theme of inclusive salvation and concern for the poor, the outcasts, and those on the margins of society provides the church with the necessary tools for critical reflection. Jesus presents the kingdom of God as a hospital where people can come and get healed and helped by Spirit-filled believers. The church is not a courtroom where people are disqualified from care, because of their past, ethnicity, race or gender. When asked, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinner?" Jesus answered, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have come to call not the righteous but sinners to repentance" (Lk. 5:31-32). Just as Jesus was the messianic hope for the poor, blind, oppressed, and captives in scripture, the church must provide hope in the form a viable ministry for those oppressed and held captive by social and economic inequalities and disparities. The church must move beyond ministry in the comfort zone and go into the margins of society and help people be all that God has called them to be.

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[42] Angelo Lopez, "The Gospel of Luke and Social Justice," Google Search, https://www.google.com/amp/s/angelolopez.wordpress.com/2015/01/06/the-gospel-of-luke-and-social-justice/amp/.

Not only does Luke 4:18-21 call for self-introspection on the "who" and "how" a church's approach engages ministry, the selected pericope calls the church to confront the powers that be who perpetuate maintaining the status-quo of the have-and-have-nots. This often means holding itself (the church) in judgement. In a church climate that is still largely segregated by race and political ideologies, Luke stands as a reminder that Jesus comes to unite and not to divide. Jesus' presence in the Temple is, on one hand a critique, and on the other hand, a model on how ministry should be done.

Jesus invites people to the table of fairness, justice, and equality with open arms. He does not block anyone from his table. Quoting Geoffrey Wainwright, Marco Hofheinz draws a wonderful analogy of what the Eucharistic table of God should be:

> The Eucharist, properly celebrated, is a sign of that generous justice by which God invites the hungry and the thirsty to his table (Isaiah 55; Luke 6:21). As the creative prefiguration of the feast which God is preparing for all people beyond the conquest of death (Isaiah 25:6-9), the Lord's meal should prompt Christians, who have themselves been welcomed equally to the sacrament, towards a fair distribution of the divine recourses.[43]

At God's table, the poor are welcome, the blind are welcome, the oppressed and the captives are welcome. Jesus is concerned about the "least of these." It takes resources to provide effective ministry, but to truly emulate Jesus' model of ministry in Luke 4:16-21, the church must be willing to help those who may not be deemed able to help the church.

In the current worldly and national state of affairs, there are many reasons for hopelessness and despair. The outbreak of Covid-19, the worse health epidemic since 1918, has claimed over 100,000 American lives, which has revealed ongoing health disparities by predominantly affecting African Americans and other minorities. The ongoing pandemic has contributed to higher rates of joblessness, which only compounds

[43] Hofheinz, "Good News to the Poor," 46.

the wealth gap and income disparities among Americans. The American justice system's failure to respond to several police-involved murders involving African Americans appropriately has prompted worldwide protests and rioting. The contemporary political, social, economic, and educational landscape resembles the landscape of Jesus' time. The world and the church need revival. The poor are still in need of good news, the blind still needs to recover their sight, and the oppressed and the captives still need to be released.

Amidst these factors contributing to the legitimate feelings of hopelessness and despair, Jesus shows us in Luke 4:16-21 that there is hope, not just an eschatological hope but a present hope. God is concerned about the poor, outcasts, marginalized, and maligned. He provides a model of both prophetic and practical ministry designed to confront and correct the systems perpetuating and maintaining the status quo. Just as Jesus was anointed to bring and be the good news in scripture, the Holy Spirit anointed the church to be the witnesses of the good news. This is only possible by modeling the ministry and mission of Jesus in the scriptures. If the church emulates and implements Jesus' model of prophetic teaching and practice demonstrated in scripture, the church will be a source of hope and a catalyst for community revival and renewal.

CHAPTER THREE

HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

A proper reading of Luke's gospel (through the lens of the life and ministry of Jesus) affirms social justice as a "biblical mandate of faith and an expression/extension of Christian discipleship."[1] Social justice promotes economic, political, and social equality and access for all regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, or socioeconomic status. Social justice is the application of biblical ethics and themes of justice, mercy, love, compassion, and to (economic/social) systems, policies, and cultures. The "prophetic" and liberating work begun by Moses in Exodus and promulgated by the other Old Testament prophets, culminates in (the life, ministry, and death) the Jesus of Luke's gospel. In an article titled "Luke, the Gospel of Social Justice," Deacon Paul Carlson wrote:

> No other New Testament writer emphasizes the social justice aspect of Christian living to the depth that Luke does. He preserves the many sayings of Jesus' warning that those with material possessions have a responsibility to the poor and disadvantaged. He attacks the racism and discrimination against the untouchables that existed – the lepers, Samaritans, Gentiles, tax collectors, women, and the poor who had no voice.[2]

[1] Adam Taylor, "What Does Social Justice Really Mean," World Vision, https://www.worldvision.org/blog/social-justice-really-mean.

[2] Paul Carlson, "Luke, the Gospel of Social Justice," About Catholics, https://www.aboutcatholics.com/beliefs/luke-the-gospel-of-social-justice/.

Labeled by some as the "Social Gospel," the Jesus of Luke's gospel has a clear social agenda of inclusion and equality. Jesus ushers in the "kingdom of God" with an emphasis on the "poor, blind, oppressed, and captive" (4:18-19) – the marginalized, the excluded, and those denied equal access from social structures. Jesus ministers to a Samaritan woman at the well ignoring the cultural, societal barriers, and the historical hostility that existed between Jews and Samaritans (Jn. 4). He touches and heals lepers (Lk. 5:12-16) he heals a Roman official's servant (Jn. 7:1-10), and he heals a blind beggar (Lk. 18:35-43). Jesus uses "Jubilee" language like "release," "recover," and "redemption" to reveal his concern for both the marginalized and the socioeconomic factors contributing to their conditions. *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* describes the Year of Jubilee "as the Sabbath rest at the end of seven sabbatical annual cycles – every 49 or 50 years (Lev. 25:8). During this year, economic debts were to be forgiven, land restored to families who sold it to repay debt, and slaves sold to repay debt were to be liberated."[3] Jesus came to give people (Sabbath) rest from corrupt practices and unjust systems. For Luke, salvation is about redeeming souls (spiritual), and it is also about reclaiming society from unjust, oppressive, and evil social constructs.

In the current climate of hopelessness and despair, the church must reevaluate and re-envision its "kingdom mandate" for social justice. Some churches do not ascribe social justice to be a spiritual imperative because of the ambiguity surrounding the term. Adam Taylor explains, "Social justice is a catch-all term that has gone through many seasons of being "en vogue" and then going out of favor, often suffering from competing definitions

[3] John D. Barry, *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), digital ed., https://LexhamPress.com.

and vastly different interpretations."[4] The ambiguity surrounding the terms "social" and "justice" has rendered social justice a victim of partisan politics. The gospel is neither left nor right but rather righteous. Dr. Vance Ross rightly asserts in depoliticizing the social gospel/justice, the gospel must be re-politicized through the life and lens of Jesus Christ.[5] Lost in petty politics, differing of opinions, and the differing of interpretation is the inability of the church to view the pursuit of social justice as a spiritual obligation. Rather than embracing social justice as a spiritual mandate, many churches opt not to engage in it all, relegating the work of social justice to institutions other than the church.

Another obstacle to the social engagement of the church is the misinterpreting and manipulation of scripture. The proper interpretation is critical for scripture because orthodoxy (right teaching or understanding) leads to orthopraxy (right practice or behavior). Good theology is necessary for correct application of scripture. The misinterpretation, misuse, and abuse of scripture to keep the marginalized subjected and oppressed is a consistent theme throughout history.[6] Therefore, part of the church's

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[4] Taylor, "What Does Social Justice Really Mean," https://www.worldvision.org/blog/social-justice-really-mean.

[5] The idea of re-politicizing social justice was taken from a phone conversation with Dr. Vance Ross on July 10, 2020. In his book, "The Politics of Jesus: Rediscovering the True Revolutionary Nature of Jesus' Teachings and How They Have Been Corrupted," Obery Hendricks argues both the prophetic and political nature of Jesus' life and ministry. For those who would argue with Hendrick's assessment of Jesus as a political figure, he argues: Jesus was not political in the modern sense of the term characterized by "partisanship, power plays, and *ungodly* alliances and compromises." "Jesus was a political revolutionary in the sense he proclaimed not only called for change in individual hearts but also demanded sweeping and comprehensive change in political, social, and economic structures in his setting in life: colonized Israel (The Politics of Jesus, 5).

[6] An example of the misuse/abuse of scripture is concerning African American Slavery. One such scripture was Leviticus 25:44-46, which states, "Your male and female slaves are to come from the nations around you; from them you may buy slaves. You may also buy some of the temporary residents living among you and members of their clans born in your country, and they will become your property. You can bequeath them to your children as inherited property and can make them slaves for life, but you must not rule over your fellow Israelites ruthlessly." Another scripture was Paul's letter to Titus, where he encourages Onesimus, a runaway slave, to return to his master. This scripture was instrumental in the passing of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1950.

ongoing task is to redeem social justice given scripture and place it in the proper biblical context. The correct interpretation of scriptures like Luke 4:18-19, Micah 6:8, and Matthew 25:31-40 provide the church with both a model and marching orders to practice social justice.[7]

Engaging in social justice and social reform is not an option for the church. Although it is not optional, it is also not easy. To be true to Jesus' model of social justice and reform will require the courage to be revolutionaries. Just as Jesus spoke truth to power, disrupted normal temple business (Matt. 21:12-13), and confronted the religious leaders of his day (Lk. 11:37-54), the church must also be willing to assume these postures of confrontation toward the powers that be. Social justice is not for the weak or the faint of heart. Confronting the "powers that be" requires longsuffering, injury and sacrifice. Those reaping the spoils from the exploitation of unjust social systems do not easily give up their power and positions. They resist and fight back against any opposition to their status quo. Jesus was literally put to death for exercising his convictions and acting out against the powers that be of his time.

Social action must be a form of evangelism for the church. In an article, "Evangelism for Social Justice," Carlyle Stewart makes the case that social justice should be an extension of the Christian faith and practice in the form of evangelism. The traditional approach to evangelism tends to focus more on individual conversion without thinking through the wider implications of how individual conversion should translate

[7] Micah 6:8 says, "He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God" (NRSV). Matthew 25:31-41 is a parable describing the Kingdom of God's social ethic and mandate, which is to "feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and welcome the stranger."

into communal concerns for social justice. Stewart goes further to explain what evangelism for social justice ultimately means:

> Evangelism for social justice addresses the total needs of the individuals and communities. What occurs in the collective social realm is just as important as what happens in the individual personal realm. The social, economic, educational and political needs are just as important as how we minister to the personal, spiritual needs of the people we are called to serve. The church should develop models of outreach that embrace other realms of concern, particularly in communities where poverty and absence of social and environmental justice destroys a people's sense of wholeness, well-being and vitality and thwart their meaningful conversion and connection with Christ through the church.[8]

With the widening wealth gap due to economic inequities, abject poverty and the lack of access and resources for minorities and the marginalized to health care and living wages, cruel and unjust immigration policies, and a broken justice system, people everywhere are in desperate need of hope. The church is called to be hope and spread the good news of the gospel that includes social evangelism to the social misfits and the economic outcasts. The good news of the social gospel is not only in proclamation, but it includes demonstration and practice – bold and courageous social evangelism.

The purpose of this historical foundation chapter is to analyze the Social Gospel Movement (1870 – 1920) and show its relevancy to the doctoral project entitled "Hopeful Imagination: The Prophetic Ministry of Jesus as a Guide for Church and Community Development." The hesitancy or the neglect of engaging social reform is an issue for many churches, especially in rural settings. Most lack the skills and resources to effectively help the areas they serve. The chapter will prove that the Social Gospel Movement is a biblical mandate and an extension of Christian evangelism and discipleship. Social justice reform and advocacy models holistic ministry – spiritual,

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[8] Carlyle Stewart, "Evangelism for Social Justice," Ministry Matters, https://www.-ministrymatters-com.utsdatton.idm.oclc.org/all/entry/452/evangelism-for-social-justice.

social, and economic. If churches proclaim and practice the social gospel, churches and communities will experience revival and renewal.

What is the Social Gospel Movement?

The social gospel movement was a prominent religious social reform movement in the United States from 1870 to 1920. It began as a largely progressive faith-based movement to address a myriad of problems resulting from the aftermath of the American Civil War (urbanization, industrialization, and immigration). Wendy Deichmann describes the social and cultural landscape of the Social Gospel Movement as follows:

> American society faced extreme levels of social relocation of massive numbers of those emancipated from slavery, a rapidly accelerated pace of both industrialization and urbanization, and unprecedented waves of immigration." In addition to the obvious, dire need for reconstruction, the post-bellum era was characterized by wage depression, high illiteracy and unemployment rates, extensive poverty, racial discrimination, poor sanitation, and plagues of human trafficking, lynching, liquor abuse and civic corruption. These and other social crises pressed hard upon large segments of the populace, compelling the attention of many American protestants who, along with a progressive view of history, had inherited from earlier evangelical and puritan visionaries a vision of a godly nation.[9]

The Social Gospel Movement applied scripturally-based Christian principles to social problems. The movement can be summed up in a novel written in 1897 by Charles Sheldon, an American clergyman, entitled, *In His Steps: What Would Jesus Do.* In his novel, Sheldon coined the maxim "What Would Jesus Do," which became a central theme of the Social Gospel Movement. What Would Jesus Do (WWJD) "emphasized that religion's fundamental purpose was to create systemic changes in American political

[9] Wendy J. Deichmann, "The Social Gospel as a Grassroots Movement," *Church History* 84, no. 1 (March 2015): 203, https://search-ebschohost-com.utsdayton.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rfh&AN=ATLA

structures" by applying the life and ministry of Jesus to social and economic structures.[10] Jesus not only represented opposition and resistance to oppressive and exploitative systems (political, economic, and religious), he also modeled change in the scriptures. The first miracle performed by Jesus is recorded in the Gospel of John of Jesus changing water to wine at a wedding ceremony. Performing a miracle at a social event reveals Jesus' concern for humanity was not limited to the spiritual. The miracle at the wedding illustrates the social implications of the gospel by highlighting Jesus' desire to perform miracles in a social setting.

Proponents of the Social Gospel Movement operated on the theological convictions "that the church and religious community should and could play a significant role in reforming the nation's disjointed social, economic, and political life."[11] In light of society's ills, Gary Dorrien adds:

> The Social Gospel made society a subject of redemption. Social justice became intrinsic to salvation. Before the modern era, nobody knew there was such a thing as social structure. With the Social Gospel, the church began to say that if people suffer because of politics and economics, then the church has to deal with politics and economics, and it has to do so by changing unjust social structures.[12]

The Social Gospel Movement rescued the church from a "scriptural" shallow view of social justice and placed it in its proper biblical and "kingdom" context. It went against

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[10] Christopher H. Evans, "How the Social Gospel Movement Explains the Roots of Today's Religious Left," *The Conversation,* July 17, 2017, https://theconversation.com/how-the-social-gospel-movement-explains-the-roots-of-todays-religious-left-78895.

[11] Moses N. Moore Jr., "From Atlanta to Brooklyn: The Social Gospel Ministry and Legacy of Henry H. Proctor," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 62, no. 3–4 (2010): 53, https://search-ebscohost-com.utsdayton.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rfh&AN=ATLA0001836023&site=ehost-live.

[12] Gary J. Dorrien, "Economic Crisis, Economic Justice, and the Divine Commonwealth," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 64, no. 1 (2013): 15, https://search-ebscohostcom.utsdayton.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rfh&AN=ATLA0001953861&site=ehost-live.

the conventional or traditional worldview notion of "compartmentalizing" the church's spiritual work from the social responsibility of the church. In scripture, Jesus modeled holistic ministry that was revolutionary. In the words of Dr. Rudy Rasmus, Jesus "comforted the afflicted and critiqued and afflicted the comforted."[13] He (Jesus) not only proclaimed good news to the poor, the blind, and the oppressed, but he offered critique and correction to the systemic social structures at the root of communal and societal ills. Centering the social gospel message in and around scripture, particularly the life and ministry of Jesus, was the motivation for the church to expand its reach beyond spiritual matters within the walls of the sanctuary or ministry comfort zones. With the Social Gospel Movement, the church now had a religious, moral, ethical obligation to address social issues and affect social reform.

The faithful application of scripture was the impetus for the Social Gospel Movement. Wendy Deichmann quotes Shailer Mathew, a leading proponent of the social gospel, describing the Social Gospel Movement as "the application of the teachings of Jesus and the total message of the Christian salvation to society, the economic life, and the social institutions such as the state, the family, as well as individuals."[14] The theology for the Social Gospel Movement centered around the concept of the kingdom of God on earth as "an earthly realm of social justice, and the immanent presence of God in social movements."[15] The first great commandment to "love the Lord your God with all your

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[13] The quote was gleamed from a conversation I had with Dr. Rudy Rasmus on June 11, 2020.

[14] Deichmann, "The Social Gospel as a Grassroots Movement," 203.

[15] Harold Wells, "J. S. Woodsworth: Christian Socialist and Peace-Monger (Part I)," *Touchstone* 33, no. 2 (June 2015): 57, https://search-ebscohost-com.utsdayton.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rfh&AN=ATLAiG0K160705001897&site=ehost-live. This quote is taken from the German theologian Albrecht Ritschl who was heavily influential to the theology of the social gospel movement.

heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind," and the second great commandment to "love your neighbor as yourself" (Lk. 10:27) were the primary scriptures used to theologically support the social gospel. These two commandments show the correlation between the love of God and the love of neighbor. The social gospel echoes the sentiments of the epistle writer when stating, "Those who say, 'I love God,' and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen." The commandment we have from his is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also" (1 Jn. 4:20).

How one treats their neighbor truly reflects one's faithfulness and love for God. In a quote contributed to the former Vice-President of the United States, Hubert Humphrey, he states: "The moral test of government is how that government treats those who are in the dawn of life, the children; those who are in the twilight of life, the elderly; those who are in the shadows of life, the sick, the needy and the handicapped."[16] Likewise, a spiritual litmus test for the faithful adherence and application of scripture is gauged by how the church leads society in treating the oppressed, marginalized, ostracized, and weak populations of society. For the social gospel, love of God and love of neighbor meant ministry that exceeded what was spiritually relevant to include what was socially relevant for well-being, which moves people from personal piety to social practice.

According to Bradley Bateman, "The end of the First World War (1918) marked both the end of the Progressive Era, and end of the Social Gospel's widespread appeal to

[16] Paul Knight, "Letter: Quote from Humphrey, Not Gandhi," *The Columbian Online Newspaper*, https://www.columbian.com/news/2016/nov/11/letter-quote-from-humprey-not-gandhi/.

Protestant audiences."[17] The wane of influence was primarily attributed to the diversification and secularization of the Social Progressive Movement, which led to new social philosophies among its participants. Bateman further explains:

> By the second decade of the century some people had started to become skeptical of the possibility for any kingdom of fundamental change in human nature. While they were still disturbed by the kinds of social dislocation wrought by industrialism, they were less likely to see the possibility for their amelioration through any fundamental shift in human nature. The ethical improvement that the Social Gospelers preached as a necessary part of social reform was not obviously taking place on any large scale.[18]

Although some became frustrated and pessimistic by what they viewed as a lack of social efficacy, the social gospel continued to influence subsequent movements, most notably, the Civil Rights Movement (1954 to 1968) under the leadership of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Dr. King was heavily influenced by the writings of Walter Rauschenbusch, one of the prominent pioneers of the Social Gospel Movement and incorporated much of his social gospel teachings into social rights and civil rights reforms for African Americans. Dr. King was assassinated in 1968, but his "dream" of social, civil, and human rights live on in what is now considered the religious left. The religious left is a diverse group comprised of liberal Protestants, academics, progressive evangelicals, Jews, and non-religious people, who are "united around the social gospel belief that religious faith must be committed to the transformation of social structures."[19] The same social problems emanating from urbanization, industrialization, and immigration that initially inspired the

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[17] Bradley W. Bateman, "The Social Gospel and the Progressive Era," Divining America, TeacherServe, National Humanities Center, 6, https://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/tserve/twenty/tkeyinfo/socgospel.htm.

[18] Bateman, "The Social Gospel and the Progressive Era," 6.

[19] Evans, "How the Social Gospel Movement Explains the Roots of Today's Religious Left," 3-4.

Social Gospel Movement are persistent today. Due to corporate greed, there is still a need for fair, living wages for most of the American populace. Food desserts and the lack of access to basic human needs only exacerbates the problem of poverty. The social gospel is as relevant now as it ever was to offer salvation to a social order that is in desperate need of redemption.

An exhaustive critique of the Social Gospel Movement highlights its many strengths but also reveals some glaring weaknesses. Offering his thorough critique of the Social Gospel Movement, Gary Dorrien writes:

> There were seventeen (17) things wrong with the Social Gospel Movement, beginning with the fact that most of it was moralistic, idealistic, and not very brave about racial justice. We have paid a steep price in the churches for the fact that the Social Gospel failed to interrogate white supremacism as a structure of power based on privilege that presumes to define what is normal. But for all the things that Social Gospel got wrong, it got some crucial things right. It taught that Christianity has a mission to transform the structures of society in the direction of social justice. It created the Ecumenical Movement in this country. It was the wellspring of the Civil Rights Movement through the ministries of Reverdy Ransom, Benjamin Mays, Ida Wells-Barnett, Mordecai Johnson, and Martin Luther King, Jr.[20]

As the quote alludes, one of the strengths of the Social Gospel Movement was it rightfully placed the church within its scriptural context to be the leading institution for social betterment. The Social Gospel Movement highlighted the church's biblical mandate for soul and social salvation, which made it influential in the institution of several social reforms, such as advocacy for workers' rights and reforms to include eight-hour workdays, child labor laws, and unionized labor.

One of the most prominent social welfare reform organizations to emerge from the influence of the social gospel were "settlement houses." Settlement houses were

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[20] Dorrien, "Economic Crisis, Economic Justice, and the Divine Commonwealth," 14.

established in response to the poor urban living conditions created by (European) immigration, the Southern migration of Blacks, and exploitive industrialization practices. Settlement houses were urban centers of hope by "providing support services to the poor and European immigrants, often including education, healthcare, childcare, and employment resources."[21] Settlement houses represent faith in action, ministry in word and deed by applying biblical/spiritual principles (feed the hungry, love your neighbor, and clothe the naked) to social systems. Reflecting the inclusivity championed by Jesus is scripture, most settlement houses were operated and staffed by women. One of the most famous settlement houses, the Hull House in Chicago, was co-founded by Jane Addams and Elle Starr in 1889.[22]

One of the glaring weaknesses of the Social Gospel Movement was "its problematic engagement with race and resurgent racism that paralleled its formation and maturation."[23] The Social Gospel Movement, in many instances, reflected the sentiment of a nation who had difficulty socially and culturally adapting to a society coexisting with "free persons." Although many White male leaders of the social gospel recognized the plight of African Americans to be dire, their ambivalence prevented them from breaking from their racial ranks to advocate on behalf of African Americans like they championed other social reform issues. However, in the absence of White leadership, Black social

[21] Samantha Gibson, "Settlement Houses in the Progressive Era," Digital Public Library of America, https://dp.la/primary-source-sets/settlement-houses-in-theprogressiveera.

[22] Gibson, "Settlement Houses in the Progressive Era," https://dp.la/primary-source-sets/settlement-houses-in-theprogressiveera.

[23] Moore Jr., "From Atlanta to Brooklyn," 53.

activists, such as Reverdy Ransom, Henry Proctor, and numerus others carried the social gospel banner to and for African Americans.[24]

Prominent Figures in the Social Gospel Movement

No accounting of the Social Gospel Movement would be complete without examining the contributions of Walter Rauschenbusch and Washington Gladden, two of the leading figures of the social gospel. Walter Rauschenbusch, a Baptist minister and professor, was a key figure in the Social Gospel Movement. His time as a Baptist pastor in Hell's Kitchen district of New York, exposed him to the harsh realities of poverty and urban living, which led him to rethink the gospel through social (justice and reformation) lens. Rethinking the gospel through social lens led Rauschenbusch to form the Brotherhood of the Kingdom in 1982, which were a group of clergymen and scholars who wrestled with how the kingdom of God should impact social structures. The Brotherhood of the Kingdom served as a precipice to the Social Gospel Movement.

One of the theological critiques of the Social Gospel Movement was viewed as a gospel in search of theology. Rauschenbusch answered this critique with the publication of his book *Christianity and the Social Crisis* in 1907.[25] In this book, he articulated what he felt was a failing of the church. He argued that "the church had lost the social intent of Jesus and reduced salvation to the promised eternal life after death for individuals. But Rauschenbusch believed that Jesus' original notion of the kingdom of God meant the

[24] Moore Jr., "From Atlanta to Brooklyn," 53.

[25] Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis* (New York, NY: Hodder and Stoughton, 1907). Also see an updated version: Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis in the 21st Century: The Classic That Woke Up the Church*, ed. Paul Rauschenbusch (New York: NY, HarperCollins Publishers, 2007).

transformation of society in the present by following the example of the radical revolutionary - Jesus."[26] Rauschenbusch was an accomplished writer and authored several books and articles. The book *Christianity and the Social Crisis* gained him widespread acclaim and the Social Gospel Movement a lasting influence on society. Walter Rauschenbusch died on July 25, 1918, at the age of fifty-six, but his legacy influenced many other writers and thinkers including Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Bishop Desmond Tutu, and Reinhold Niebuhr, to name a few.

William Gladden, a congregational minister, was another early leader and prominent advocate of the Social Gospel Movement. Gladden, an accomplished writer with several books, articles, and hymns to his credit, served two churches before matriculating to the First Congregational Church in Columbus, Ohio serving for thirty-five years. He typified social gospel in action. While at First Congregational in Columbus, Ohio:

> Gladden's activities paralleled his preaching. In Columbus, he served a term on city council, helped parishioners establish two (2) settlement houses (Gladden Community House and the Godman Guild), served on the Board of Trade, launched new congregations in underserved neighborhoods, condemned waves of anti-Catholicism, promoted religious cooperation, ministered to students and faculty at the Ohio State University and encouraged influential members to apply Social Gospel principles in their factories and shops.[27]

Unlike some of his other White social gospel peers, Gladden did not shy away for advocating for African American civil and human rights. He is credited in helping to form the National Association of the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).

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[26] Bill Pitts, "Walter Rauschenbusch: A Centennial Legacy," *Baptist History and Heritage* 53, no. 3 (2018): 64, http://www.questia.com/read/1G1-563837769/walter-rauschenbusch-a-centennial-legacy.

[27] First Congregational Church, "Washington Gladden and Social Justice," First-church.org, last modified December 11, 2013, https://www.first-church.org/WashingtonGladden.aspx.

William Gladden died on July 2, 1918. His tireless effort to both proclaims and practice the social gospel has him remembered in history as one of the most prominent figures in the Social Gospel Movement.

The Social Gospel and Social Darwinism

The Social Gospel Movement coincided with another school of thought during the Gilded Age called Social Darwinism. This controversial ideology revealed some of the prevailing thoughts concerning the poor and economics during this time. Initially proposed by Herbert Spencer, Social Darwinism describes the "practice of misapplying the biological evolutionary language of Charles Darwin to politics, the economy, and society."[28] Proponents of Social Darwinism believed the biological concepts of "natural selection" and "survival of the fittest" equally applied to the human social order. Just as the strong and suitable survive in the biological world (through evolution, adaptation, production of off springs), the socially and economically fitted should only survive in society. Social Darwinism explained that being poor was not the result of unfair social or unjust economic factors but was the result of the poor being naturally weak and unfit. Some sociologist and political theorists used this line of thought to promote "laissez-fair" capitalism arguing against any government intervention for the poor.[29] The free-market system would eventually eliminate the socially "weak" by social natural selection.

[28] Khan Academy, "Social Darwinism is the Gilded Age," Khan Academy, https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/us-history/the-gilded-age/gilded-age/a/social-darwinism-in-the-gilded-age.

[29] Laissez-fair is a French term that translates as "leave alone." It is the belief in a free capitalist market system free of government intervention or regulation.

Social Darwinism influenced many aspects of American society, especially regarding issues of race, class, public health, and immigration. It is credited with heavily influencing the Eugenics Movement of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The practitioners of eugenics desired to create the perfect human race "by sterilizing individuals deemed 'feeble-minded,' undesirable, or unfit, which often disproportionately targeted women, minorities, and immigrants."[30] Social Darwinism and the practice of eugenics reflected the total disregard for all human life and goes against the biblical mandates of equality and inclusion of all peoples. The people eugenics identified for destruction are the very people Jesus came to save.

Although Social Darwinism has been fully discredited, it proves the relevancy of the social gospel. Rather than dismissing social factors that contribute to a person's social standing, the social gospel has the responsibility of performing intervening action/ministry. In the economy of the kingdom of God, there is no such thing as the survival of the fittest. "Loving your neighbor as yourself" is a kingdom of God ethic that requires the church to be the voice for the voiceless, advocates for those who have no access, and the mediator between cruel social structures and the justice, mercy, and grace of God. Jesus exemplifies "who is the church's neighbor" and how the church should respond when it sees a neighbor injured by any type of social violence in the following parable:

> But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and

[30] Khan Academy, "Social Darwinism is the Gilded Age," https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/us-history/the-gilded-age/gilded-age/a/social-darwinism-in-the-gilded-age.

> saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.' Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise" (Lk. 10:30-37).

Unlike the priest and the Levite in the parable, the ministry of the church is not one of avoidance or neglect. Too often, the church is guilty of assuming the posture of the priest and the Levite in the parable. The text says that they "see" the man hurting and having the ability to help him, they ignore his pain and pass by on the other side. When the Good Samaritan see's the injured man, he was "moved with compassion," which should be the response of the church when we see our neighbor hurting. The Good Samaritan does not pray for the injured man. He addresses his injuries (rubs with oil and bandages), removes him out of the environment where he was hurt (takes him to an inn) and puts him in place with a follow-up plan to ensure the man's well-being. This is the essence of the social gospel.

Conclusion

The Bible promotes a "social" view of the gospel within scripture. The proper interpretation of scriptures like Micah 6:8 and Luke 4:18-19, clarifies that the gospel is a Social Gospel, and that the church should always be moving in the direction of social change and reform. The good news is not only to comfort the poor but also to critique and confront the social structures contributing to keeping people poor and oppressed. It is the

church's job to speak truth to power and follow Jesus' model of being "radical revolutionaries" in a socially unstable world.

Scripture makes it clear that the social gospel is a biblical mandate and an extension of the Christian faith. A proper social-economic understanding of the gospel is critical to any context but is especially critical to my current context. In a small rural town that lacks jobs and resources, Kingdom Movement Community has to model a holistic evangelistic ministry that fills in the social, economic and educational voids in the community through biblical evangelism and discipleship. We live in a time where people everywhere are in the desperate need of hope. In the words of Marco Hofheinz, "being a disciple of the kingdom of God means constantly trying to confront situations with promise and promises with situations."[31] The social gospel teaches that the church is supposed to be an instrument of hope by constantly reminding the poor, the oppressed, the outcasts and the marginalized of the promises that come with being citizens of God's kingdom.

[31] Marco Hofheinz, "Good News to the Poor: The Message of Kingdom and Jesus' Announcement to His Ministry According to Luke," *Lexington Theological Quarterly* (Online) 47, no. 1-2 (Spring 2017): 49, https://search-ebscohost-com.utsdayton.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rgh&AN=ATLAiBCB171030000124&site=ehost.live.

CHAPTER FOUR

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

There are several legitimate hermeneutical approaches to reading and interpreting scripture, one is examining scripture from a Liberation Theology perspective, which starts with the oppressive conditions experienced by those who are marginalized. Liberation Theology provides a hermeneutic that speaks to the holistic needs of all who are oppressed. It is a hermeneutic that seeks freedom from all oppressive forces that come to bear upon an individual or a people, whether it is physical, political, economic, emotional, or spiritual. When viewed through the lens of Liberation Theology, the entire biblical narrative is God's revelation of liberation and freedom through the salvific work of Jesus Christ.

The theme of liberation runs like a thread throughout the biblical narrative. Moses, who was a type of Christ, liberated Israel from Egypt (Pharaoh), which represented freedom from social, economic, political, and physical oppression. The emancipatory work of Jesus on the cross, through his death and resurrection, is the means of grace by which salvation and liberation is offered to all of humanity including social, economic, and political structures.

The Greek word for free/freedom "*eleutheros*" occurs over twenty-three times in scripture (English Standard Version). It is defined as "freedom from various kinds of ownership, confinement, and distress: prison confinement, political domination and

oppression, physical sickness, release from the marriage contract in death, and God's release of the sinner from sin."[1] Jesus clearly defines his role and mission as a liberator in scripture, when declaring, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Lk. 4:19, NIV). The "good news" of the gospel is that Jesus comes to set the captives free! Scriptural testimony provides numerous examples of the liberating ministry acts of Jesus Christ:

- Jesus heals a woman with an issue of blood that results in liberation from oppressive health conditions (Mk. 5:25-34).
- Jesus' encounter with the woman at the well confronts religious and cultural oppression (Jn. 4).
- Jesus liberates a demon-oppressed man from mental, emotional, and spiritual oppression when he delivers him (Lk. 8:26-39).
- Jesus liberates the thief on the cross from the oppression of sin (Lk. 23:39-43).

These and numerous other passages suggest that Jesus facilitates release, restoration, and recovery from all forms of oppression and bondage.

Jesus models holistic ministry throughout the gospels emphasizing total salvation or complete liberation. Holistic ministry is comprehensive with the whole or total of humanity in mind. Jesus was concerned with "every dimension of human need, and sought [to bring] wholeness at every level of society – individuals, families,

[1] Stepbible.org, "Free/freedom," Stepbible.org, https://stepbible.org?q=version=ESV|strong=G1568&options=NVHUG.

communities, nations, and the global human family."[2] Bryant L. Meyers describes this type of ministry as transformational development – ministry [seeking to produce] "positive change in the whole of human life materially, socially, psychologically, and spiritually."[3] When encountering an impotent man in scripture, Jesus asks, "Do you want to be made whole?" (Jn. 5:6, King James Version). Jesus does not offer incomplete healing or partial freedom, but rather Jesus offers to make whole (spiritually, physically, mentally or emotionally, religiously, socially and economically). Ministry as transformational development reveals the relationship between liberation or freedom and transformational change and or development. Jesus is a change agent that offers a liberty that directly results in life change and or betterment. Jesus demonstrated a desire to change the quality of life of everyone he encountered!

Liberation Theology also uniquely speaks to the hopeless in that it seeks freedom from the oppressive forces and structures that lead to hopelessness. Hopelessness causes people to feel helpless and powerless to change or improve their conditions. Jesus, as Savior, is not only the source of holistic freedom or liberation, and transformation, he is also a sign and a source of transformational hope. Theologically speaking, hope is "the trusting anticipation of the future based on an understanding of a God who is trustworthy and who calls us into an open-ended future. This God keeps promises of deliverance, liberation, and salvation (Andrew Lester)."[4] Dr. Vance Ross describes this level of hope

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[2] Ronald Sider, Phillip N. Olson, and Heidi Rolland Unruh, "Holistic Ministry Defined, Christians for Social Action," https://christiansforsocialaction.org/resource/holistic-mininstry-defined/.

[3] Bryant L. Meyers, *Walking with the Poor: Principles and Practices of Transformational Development* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2014), 3.

[4] Joretta L. Marshal, "Collaborating Hope: Joining the In-Between Spaces," *Journal of Pastoral Theology* 26, no. 2 (2016): 80, https://doi.org/10.1080/10649867.2016.1247619.

as "the freedom to hope beyond your conditions."[5] Hope signals that life and a better future is still possible despite difficulties and despair, because present circumstances are not final conclusions with Jesus, the hope dealer.

When Jesus shows up, hope shows up confronting and changing hopeless situations, circumstances, and conditions. This type of transformational hope can be seen in the collaborative efforts of four men who went to great lengths to bring an unnamed paraplegic to Jesus. He was helpless and lying on a mat, but after encountering Jesus he regained the faculty of his limbs, gained a new prospectus on life, and he was empowered to carry what formerly confined him as a sign of his newfound liberation (Mk. 2:1-12). Hope can be heard when Bartimaeus shouted, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me," as he was blind and begging by the roadside when he heard that Jesus was passing through Jericho. After encountering Jesus, he "regained his sight and followed him [Jesus] on the way" to a better and brighter future (Mk. 10:46-52). Hope is personified when Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead. He was literally dead and thought to be "stinking" by the time Jesus arrived at his tomb in Bethany. Although the situation appeared hopeless, Martha's words to Jesus are saturated with hope, "But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask" (Jn. 11:22, NIV). Jesus calls Lazarus from the grip of death and the vestiges of bondage (the tomb and grave clothes) to renewed life. These are just a few of the countless examples of how Jesus liberates persons from oppressive forces and structures that lead to hopelessness.

This paper will continue to examine Liberation Theology as a theological foundation for the research project. The purpose is to give theological substance to the

[5] This quote was taken from a phone conversation with Dr. Vance Ross, a cohort mentor, on August 29, 2020.

notion of a hermeneutic of hope that leads to holistic liberation and or freedom and transformational development. The chapter will also explore the intersection of Liberation Theology and the social gospel and how this intersection can further inform the research project.

Liberation Theology and the Social Gospel

Although Liberation Theology arose out of the Catholic faith and can be viewed as an extension and furtherance of Catholic social commentary and teaching, Liberation Theology also shares commonalities with the social gospel teachings of the Protestant church. Both Liberation Theology and the social gospel were movements birthed as responses to various contextual social problems with Christian principles and ethics (with scripture). Both movements believed the church had a biblical/scriptural mandate to be at the forefront of addressing and advocating for social justice surrounding issues of poverty, oppression, predatory capitalism, government, and religious corruption. Matthew 25:31-46, which speaks to "feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the prisoner, and caring for the sick," and Luke 10:25-37, which reveals true essence of what it means to be a neighbor, are the two main scriptural references used to support the social gospel and justice mandates of Liberation Theology and the social gospel. Proponents of Liberation Theology and the social gospel operated on the following basic shared premises, "that capitalism caused an inequality which needed to be redressed, that economic justice is a key component of the kingdom of God, and that the duty and goal

of the Christians should be to work towards the realization of the kingdom of God, be that on earth or after the end of history."[6]

A social approach to the gospel and emphasizing the kingdom of God expanded the individualistic perception of sin and salvation to a more holistic one. Sin not only affected individuals in their personal relationships with God, but sin had a social consequence. It affected social structures and became the root of all injustice and oppression. Therefore, Jesus came to redeem and offer salvation to the whole of humanity, spiritual and social, political, and economic. A gospel that considered the full expression of humanity was necessary to adequately address the social, political, and economic issue facing humanity, and this is what the social gospel and Liberation Theology attempted to do.

Liberation Theology

Liberation Theology started as a theological "base Christian community" movement originating in Latin America in the 1950s and 60s as a response to abject poverty, marginalization of the poor, political, economic, social, and other forms of systemic oppression.[7] Although Liberation Theology originated in Latin America, it has impacted and influenced church and society worldwide. Liberation Theology has also influenced other types of liberation movements such as: "Black Liberation Theology,

[6] Alexander Hurst, "The Social Gospel and Liberation Theology: Responses to the Cries of the Poor," RBR Publishing, https://www.rbrpublishing.com/2017/02/13/the-social-gospel-and-liberation-theology-responses-to-the-cries-of-the-poor/.

[7] Base communities were small grassroots groups (10-30) that "came together for Bible Study, liturgy, and social action usually without trained priest or leaders. They were the operational bases in liberation theology in praxis." Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology*, 7th ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994), 10.

Latin American Liberation Theology, Womanist Liberation Theology, Feminist Liberation Theology, and Ecological Liberation Theology."[8] While each Liberation Theology interpret scripture through nuanced contextual lens, they share the common goal of liberating people through social action or justice.

The theology of liberation firmly establishes God as being "preferentially" on the side of the poor and the oppressed. James Cone, who is considered the father of Black Theology, suggests, "Any talk about God that fails to make God's liberation of the oppressed its starting point is not Christian."[9] Unlike other theologies that start with critical reflection (theory) and then praxis, Liberation Theology reverses the traditional approach and begins with praxis (practice) that leads to reflection. To some extent all theology is contextual, but Liberation Theology, more than others, places emphasis on the contexts (economic, social, political, cultural, and historical events) in which theology is done, because faith and life experiences are inseparable. Julia Hohner explains:

> Liberation theology begins with the lived experience of the people, especially those who are most poor and vulnerable, and moves to an understanding of the Gospel in the context of that lived experience. Its practice involves a constant reflection and adaptation of theory based on the context in which one finds oneself, a concept known as praxis. The ultimate goal of liberation is to understand the Gospel in light of the lived experience of the poor and oppressed so that may analyze that particular situation and thus work towards the elimination of oppression and a constant striving toward the Kingdom of God on earth.[10]

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[8] Cynthia D. Jackson, "Bloom Where You Are Planted: Transforming Your Community One Block at a Time" (DMin diss., United Theological Seminary, 2017), 73.

[9] James Cone, *Speaking the Truth: Ecumenism, Liberation and Black Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986), 4.

[10] Julia Hohner, "Critiques of Liberation Theology: A Case Study," Senior Honors Projects, 79, 3, http://collected.jcu.edu/honorspapers/79.

Leonardo and Clodovis Boff attribute the birth of Liberation Theology to "faith confronting the scandals of poverty and injustice done to the poor."[11] Gustavo Gutierrez and other proponents of Liberation Theology advocated "preferential option for the poor" and sought to hold the Christian Church accountable for the welfare of the lower class, recognizing the essential role of social justice in Christian teachings."[12] Preferential option for the poor is a main tenet of Liberation Theology and calls the (church) to emulate Christ "by loving, serving, giving, and tending with special concern the poor and the weak."[13] In advocating a preferential option for the poor, Gutierrez points out that Liberation Theology does not suggest God is exclusively for or exclusively on the side of the poor. Liberation Theology speaks to the universality and the particularity God. God places the poor and the oppressed first not only, "the challenge of liberation theology is maintaining both the universality of God's love and God's predilection for those on the lowest rungs of the ladder of history. To focus exclusively on the one or the other is to mutilate the Christian messages."[14] God gratuitously extends grace and love to all, but first and preferentially to the poor.

A complete interpretation of preferential option has three dimensions, "to be committed to the poor in the practice of one's faith and spirituality; to read human history from the perspective of the poor; and to hear the Gospel as the announcement of a just

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[11] Boff and Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology*, 3.

[12] Olivia Singer, "Liberation Theology in Latin America," Brown University Library, https://library.brown.edu/create/modernlatinamerica/chapters/chapter-15-culture-and-society/essays-on-culture-and-society/liberation-theology-in-latin-america/.

[13] Megan Levy, "The Preferential Option for the Poor – Liberation Theology, A Call to Action," ResearchOnline@ND, https://researchonline.nd.edu.au/theo_conference/7.

[14] Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 15th anniversary ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), xxvi.

kingdom."[15] The love of God obligates the church to see the poor and oppressed in their full humanity, and not as outcastes but as neighbors. As our neighbors, there is an obligation to stand with them in solidarity and struggle alongside them for freedom, justice, and equality. To be on the side of God is to be for and on the side of those God prefers (the poor and oppressed).

At the heart of Liberation Theology is the affirmation that the poor and the oppressed have a fundamental right to life, which is a basic human right and a gift from God that must be protected from all instruments of oppression. Rev. Dr. Kenneth York adds, "Liberation Theology seeks to achieve social and political liberation by attacking the root causes of poverty and injustice, to free the poor and marginalized from everything that limits their capacity to be all that God has made them to be."[16] Liberation is holistic and "touches and influences every level of human activity, from economic to religious," seeking freedom for the oppressed and the oppressor; the exploiter and the exploited; and the systems of oppression and the symptoms oppressions.[17]

Liberation Theology and Poverty

Addressing poverty and the conditions that perpetuate it are both the goals and the challenges of Liberation Theology. Liberation Theology establishes that poverty is not

[15] Gustavo Gutierrez, "A Hermeneutic of Hope," Occasional Paper no. 13, Center for Latin American Studies, Vanderbilt University, 2012, 10, https://as.vanderbilit.edu/clas-resources/media/A-Hermeneutic-of-Hope.pdf.

[16] This quote was taken from a phone conversation with Dr. York on October 26, 2020.

[17] Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation,* xvii.

"an unavoidable fate, poverty is not simply a misfortune; it is an injustice (Gutierrez)."[18] As John Dear states, "Poverty is not the result of fate or laziness [that so many is the dominant classes believe], but is due to structural injustices that privilege some while marginalizing others."[19] Poverty is the product of human domination, exploitation, and manipulation, and the politically and economically strong abusing the socially weak, which is ultimately the result of sin and human depravity.

Gustavo Gutierrez admits that understanding poverty can be both complex and ambiguous and attempts to add clarity to the term by identifying three distinct but interrelated forms of poverty which are material poverty, spiritual poverty, and voluntary poverty. Referencing the work of Daniel Groody, John Dear details the dimension of poverty as follows:

> *Real [material] poverty* means privation, or the lack of goods necessary to meet basic human needs. It means inadequate access to education, health care, public services, and discrimination because of culture, race or gender. Gutierrez reiterates that such poverty is evil; it is a subhuman condition which the majority of humanity lives today, and it poses a major challenge to every Christian conscience and therefore to spirituality and theological relocation. *Spiritual poverty* is about a radical openness to the will of God, a radical faith in a providential God, and a radical trust in a loving God. It is also known as spiritual childhood, from which flows the renunciation of material goods. Relinquishing possessions comes from a desire to be more possessed by God also and to love and serve God more completely. *Voluntary poverty* is a conscious protest against injustice by choosing to live together with those who are materially poor. Its inspiration comes from the life of Jesus who entered into solidarity with the human condition in order to help human beings overcome the sin that enslaves and impoverishes them. Voluntary poverty affirms that Christ came to live as a poor person not because poverty itself has any intrinsic value but to criticize and challenge those people and systems that oppress the poor and compromise their

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[18] Daniel Hartnett, "Remembering the Poor: An Interview with Gustavo Gutierrez," *American Jesuit Magazine* (February 3, 2003), https://www.americanmagazine.org/faith/2003/02/03/remebering-poor-interview-gustavo-gutierrez.

[19] John Dear, "Gustavo Gutierrez and the Preferential Option for the Poor," *National Catholic Reporter*, https://ncronline.or/blogs/road-peace/gustavo-gutierrez-and-preferential-option-poor.

> God – given dignity. It involves more than detachment, because the point is not to love poverty but to love the poor (Daniel Groody).[20]

Another type of poverty that results from material poverty is mental or emotional poverty. This form of psychological poverty is the consequence of persistent and unaddressed problems that arise out of material poverty. The prolonged absence of "basic" necessities and denied access to life-giving resources trap individuals in prisons of hopelessness and despair. It is poverty incapable of hope. Mental and emotional poverty is resigning to the belief that poor and oppressive conditions are the will of God or that they are insurmountable or that there is no hope for a better present or a brighter future. Just as material poverty is generational, mental, and emotional poverty is also generational. Gutierrez speaks to this phenomenon concerning the women in his parish who believe that "they are born to suffer; that suffering is their destiny."[21] Generational, material, and psychological poverty are the problems the ministry project attempts to address. Not only is a hermeneutic of hope necessary to alleviate a sense of hopelessness and despair, but practical ministries must be implemented to inspire hope that facilitates transformational development.

Understanding poverty as material, spiritual, voluntary, mental, and emotional presents it as a socioeconomic phenomenon to be rejected but also as a spiritual requisite to be emulated by followers of Christ. Liberation Theology is theology in action, imitation, and emulation of Jesus Christ who intentionally became poor and oppressed to free individuals from all forms of poverty. Exercising solidarity with the poor and the

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[20] Dear, "Gustavo Gutierrez and the Preferential Option for the Poor," https://ncronline.or/blogs/road-peace/gustavo-gutierrez-and-preferential-option-poor.

[21] Gutierrez, *A Hermeneutic of Hope*, 7.

oppressed, Jesus purposefully chose poverty over prestige and models how spiritual and voluntary poverty looks in Paul's epistle to the Philippians:

> Though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on the cross (Phil. 2:6-8).

Liberation is emulating Jesus by critiquing, confronting, and challenging poverty and its causes. It is protesting its dehumanization and actively participating in restoring the poor to their full humanity and their redemptive potential in the God of the poor and the oppressed. A theology of liberation sees the poor crucified (oppressed) Christ in the plight of the poor. Like Christ, the crucified poor needs to be "raised to life" in an act of solidarity siding with the poor and aiding in their struggle to end marginalization and oppression.[22]

Poverty is a consistent theme in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. Through biblical analysis, Gustavo further distinguishes poverty into a scandalous state and a spiritual childhood. The former speaks to material poverty (lack of resources and or necessities), an unjust evil to be vigorously opposed. The latter reinforces the concept of spiritual poverty, where there is a radical "openness to the will of God" (as it pertains to siding with the poor who are oppressed) and a hunger for the bread of God.

Poverty is correctly described as "scandalous," because it: 1) objectifies the poor by rendering them insignificant and viewing them as non-persons justifiably excluded from equal access and participation in social/economic order, and 2) poverty causes premature and unjust death. Poverty is unjust and unnecessary death – physical, spiritual, psychological, and sometimes cultural death – due to:

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[22] Boff and Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology*, 4.

> The lack of food and housing, the inability to attend properly to health and education needs, the exploitation of workers, permanent unemployment, the lack of respect for one's human dignity, and unjust limitations placed on personal freedom in the areas of self-expression, politics, and religion. Poverty is a situation that destroys peoples, families, and individuals.[23]

Breaking the cycle of poverty and premature death involves the reordering of structures that perpetuate oppression but also by the redeeming of humanity to its fullest form and potential in God. The poor may be economically and politically insignificant, but they are not insignificant in the sight of God, and the loving God excludes no one from his care, concern, and loving action.

Liberation Theology and Salvation

Liberation Theology's understanding of poverty articulates the soteriological nature of liberation.[24] Liberation is salvation from sin, which is the root cause of poverty, oppression, and injustice. Sin creates separation from God and between humanity preventing communion as God intends. Therefore, "salvation is not merely liberation, it is communion with God and one another in history and beyond" – salvation as fellowship with God and salvation as fellowship with the poor.[25] Liberation is restorative in that "it sets free to give life – communion with God and with others – or liberation for communion and participation."[26] Consequently, the process of liberation is twofold: A "freedom from" and a "freedom for." The former is freedom from all oppression, and the

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[23] Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, xxi.

[24] Soteriology is basically the study of salvation.

[25] Joyce Murray, "Liberation for Communion in the Soteriology of Gustavo Gutierrez," *Theological Studies* 59 (1998): 51, https://cdn.theologicalstudies.net/59/59./59.1.3.pdf.

[26] Murray, *Liberation for Communion in the Soteriology of Gustavo Gutierrez*, 54, https://cdn.theologicalstudies.net/59/59./59.1.3.pdf.

latter is freedom to love, be in communion (with God and in solidarity with the oppressed and the poor), and the freedom to experience the full expression of humanity.

To determine the full scope of salvation, it must be viewed in relation with liberation, which has three dimensions:

1. "*Political and social liberation*, which points towards the elimination of the immediate causes of poverty and injustice, especially with regard to socio-economic structures. On this basis, an attempt can be made to construct a society based on respect for the other, and especially for the weakest and the insignificant.

2. *Human liberation*, meaning that, although aware that changing social structures is important, we need to go deeper. It means liberating human beings of all those things - not just the social sphere – that limit their capacity to develop themselves freely and in dignity. Here we are speaking of what Vatican II called a 'new humanism" (cf. GS 55);

3. And crucially, *liberation from selfishness and sin*. In the analysis of faith, this is the last root of injustice that has to be eliminated. Overcoming this leads to re-establishing friendship with God and with other people (cf. Lumen Gentium n. I). It is clear that only the grace of God, the redeeming work of Christ can overcome sin."[27]

Several concepts emerge about salvation from this assessment of liberation, which are salvation as community, salvation as communion, and salvation as gratuitous love. Sin affects both individuals and social structures. Humanity must be liberated from external oppressions, individual oppression that denies agency to transcend poverty, and liberated from sin that prevents communion with God and neighbor. Liberation, with the ultimate goal being salvation, is best achieved through community. Joyce Murray expounds:

> Through communal praxis, solidarity, and gratuitous love, they (the oppressed) help make salvation a reality in history as they engage in liberation for communion; they see themselves also as agents and witnesses of salvation. Liberative communities among the believing poor are sacraments of salvation in

[27] Gustavo Gutierrez and Judith Condor, "The Task and Content of Liberation Theology," in *The Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology*, ed. Christopher Rowland (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 26, https://doi.org/10.1017/CCOL0521868831.003.

> that they effect what they signify, namely communion with God and one another.[28]

Undergirding the community and communal praxis of liberation is the concept of God as gratuitous love. God is love, and God extends his/her love gratuitously to all, especially the poor and marginalized! This gratuitous love is displayed in Jesus' selfless sacrifice on the cross to redeem humanity to restored communion (with God and neighbor). As beneficiaries of gratuitous love, Liberation Theology calls us to extend the same level of love in selfless acts of solidarity with the poor.

Developing a Liberation Hermeneutic

Liberation Theology, from historical and theological perspectives, is not a new type of theology. Christopher Rowland supports this claim in stating:

> Liberation theology is not the accumulation of, or learning about, a distinctive body of distinctive information, though the perspective may well produce an approach to parts of the spectrum of the Christian tradition which are either ignored or denied. Liberation theology is above all a new way of doing theology rather than being itself a new theology.[29]

The development of a liberation hermeneutic was "new way of doing theology" as opposed to "doing a new theology" in response to the inactivity of the church in addressing social concerns and to the misuse of existing theology," ignoring what scripture had to say about the poor and the oppressed.[30] Liberation theologians operated

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[28] Murray, *Liberation for Communion in the Soteriology of Gustavo Gutierrez*, 53, https://cdn.theologicalstudies.net/59/59./59.1.3.pdf.

[29] Rowland, *The Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology*, 3.

[30] Andrei Meleshko, "Hermeneutic of the Theology of Liberation: Community and Freedom," *Theological Reflections* (2013), 58, https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/hermeneutic-of-the-theology-of-liberation-community-and-freedom.

from a "hermeneutic of suspicion" offering an alternative approach to viewing and interpreting the whole Bible through liberative lens.

Rita Felski explains hermeneutic suspicion as "the name usually bestowed on [a] technique of reading texts against the grain and between the lines, of cataloging their omissions and laying bare their contradictions, of rubbing in what they fail to know and cannot represent."[31] It is scrutinizing prior or traditional readings of scripture to locate the absent or ignored themes and peoples necessary for a full accounting of scripture. A hermeneutic of suspicion is necessary to rescue scripture from Westernized and Americanized influences on Christianity that the "status quo" and "powers that be" use as tools of misinterpretation, misappropriation, and misuse to maintain relationships of domination and oppression.

Noted Black theologian, Howard Thurman affirmed the need for a hermeneutic of suspicion when asserting, "It cannot be denied that too often the weight of the Christian movement has been on the side of the strong and the powerful and against the weak and oppressed – this despite the gospel."[32] Christians are historically guilty of using scripture to justify inhuman treatment (African American slavery) and subjugating other minority classes to lives of debasement and abuse. Rather than using scripture to affirm the poor, the oppressed, and the other as objects of God's affection and liberative love, it has been manipulated by some to maintain systems and structures of injustice and exploitation.

James Cones, considered to be the father of Black Theology, supported a hermeneutic of liberation when developing Black Liberation Theology. Black Liberation

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[31] Rita Felski, "Context Stinks!" *New Literary History* 42, no. 4 (2011), https://doi.org/10.1353/nlh.2011.0045.

[32] Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1976), 20.

Theology was Cone's response to the Black struggle against humiliation, oppression, and injustice at the hands of White supremacy. Black Theology wrestled with the question, "What does it mean to be black and Christian for a people situated in the midst of American racism and called by God to be full human beings?"[33] Cone attributed the major obstacle to Black freedom and liberation to White supremacy and White Christian (church and theological) complicity. He metaphorically uses the story of Cain (White Christians) and Abel (suffering and oppressed Blacks) to describe Black suffering and death at the hands of White aggression and hatred. Just as Abel's blood "cried out from the ground," Cone argues that the blood of suffering Blacks is crying out from the ground for help and justice. Therefore, according to James Cone, a theology of Black liberation arose "as a critique of white theology that said blacks were inferior and unimportant for theological and physiological reflection thus rendering black blood and black suffering insignificant."[34]

In response to Black insignificance and an attempt to define the goal of Black Theology, Dwight Hopkins describes Black Theology as "the ongoing effort of black people regaining and redeeming the significance of their blackness by freeing black minds from self-hate and subordination to white power."[35] According to Edward Donaldson III, Black Theology:

> Analyzes the condition of Blackness in light to of God's revelation in Jesus Christ both to create a new understanding of Black dignity among Black people and to

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[33] Dwight N. Hopkins, *Introducing Black Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), 9, http://web.a.ebscohost.com.dtl.idm.oclc.org/ehost/detail/detail?vid=0&sid=a749bdb0-f7d8-40e8-b002-694a5dd423d6%40sessionmgr4006&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWhvc3QtbGI2ZSZzY29wZT1zaXRI#AN=1901367&db=nlebk.

[34] James H. Cone, "The Cry of Black Blood: The Rise of Black Liberation Theology," Union Theological Seminary, February 25, 2016, video, YouTube.

[35] Hopkins, *Introducing Black Theology*, 9.

> provide the necessary soul in that people to destroy racism. Liberation theology establishes a theological foundation for the complete emancipation of Black people from white oppression by whatever means Black people deem necessary.[36]

Black Liberation Theology is the affirmation of Black significance and the fullness of Black humanity. It is admission to the fact that God created Blacks to be free, and Jesus in his "blackness," not only identifies with Black suffering and oppression; he overcomes suffering through his death, suffering, and resurrection making it possible for Blacks to be free and fully human.[37]

Concerning the need for a biblical Black liberation hermeneutic, Cone acknowledged that different theological interpretations emerge from different experiences and social-economic locations. He further explained:

> He and white theologians read Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and the Bible from different social locations and thus with different hermeneutical interests. They both read selectively – white theologians from a liberal white dominant viewpoint and Cone from a radical black perspective of the marginalized.[38]

Like other liberation theologians, Cone believed that a biblically-oriented theology could not be fully developed absent the influences of concrete human experiences and or conditions. Prior to the emergence of Liberation Theology, theologies were developed by theologians "descendent of the [privileged] or advantaged class and often represented the consciousness of the class," and therefore, failed to address the particularities and

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[36] Edward Donaldson III, "An Homage to James Cone: A Call to Action," Worship and Liturgy, https://worshipandliturgysustm.com/2018/05/01/an-homage-to-james-cone-a-call-to-action/.

[37] James Cone argues that Jesus was black not on the basis of skin color but on the basis of him identifying with the experience of and voluntarily entering into the experiences with the poor, the oppressed and blacks in scripture.

[38] Cone, *God of the Oppressed,* ix.

nuances of the lived experiences of Blacks, the poor, oppressed, the marginalized from a biblical perspective.[39] Cone furthers his critique of White theologians by pointing out:

> Unfortunately, American theologians from Cotton Mather and Johnathan Edwards to Reinhold Niebuhr and Schubert Ogden, including radicals and conservatives, have interpreted the gospel according to the cultural and political interests of white people. They have rarely attempted to transcend the social interests of their group by seeking an analysis of the gospel in light of the consciousness of black people struggling for liberation.[40]

Consequently, Liberation Theology reinterprets or rereads scripture from the perspective of the marginalized, the oppressed and Blacks giving presence and significance to those historically "absent or of little importance in church and society."[41]

Themes of liberation and God's concern for the spiritually, socially, politically, and economically disadvantaged are present throughout Old Testament and New Testament scriptures. Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff trace these varying themes through the Bible, which support a liberation hermeneutic, starting with the book of Exodus:

- "*Exodus*, because it recounts the epic of the politico-religious liberation of a mass of slaves who, though the power of the covenant with God, became the people of God;
- The *Prophets*, for their uncompromising defenses of the liberator God, their vigorous denunciation of injustices, their revindication of the rights of the poor, and their proclamation of the messianic world;
- The *Gospels*, obviously, for the centrality of the divine person of Jesus, with his announcement of the kingdom, his liberating actions, and his death and resurrection – the final meaning of history.
- The *Acts of the Apostles*, because they portray the idea of a free and liberating Christian Community;

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[39] Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 43.

[40] Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 43.

[41] Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, xx.

- Revelation, because in collective and symbolic terms it describes the immense struggles of the people of God against the monsters of history."[42]

The entirety of scripture bears witnesses to the legitimacy of a liberation hermeneutic. Starting with liberating Israel out of Egypt and the culmination with Jesus liberating humanity from all forms of bondage and oppression on the cross, God is not silent concerning the poor, the marginalized, the insignificant or those deemed the "least of these." God is not indifferent to abuse, injustice, domination, or exploitation of the weak at the hands of the strong. The good news of the gospel is that God is the God of the oppressed, the God of the "disinherited," marginalized, Black, poor, insignificant, and the other. God is a God of the oppressed who loves gratuitously and makes possible a full expression of humanity for all. God hears, sees, and responds to the hurting and oppressed (Ex. 3). God demands mercy and justice for the politically, socially, and the economically exploited, which is explicitly revealed and supported by scripture.

Liberation and Hope

A hermeneutic of liberation is simultaneously a hermeneutic of hope. The work of liberation should be both grounded and guided by a hope that is rooted in faith. For Gustavo Gutierrez, the hope necessary for integral liberation is not the same as optimism. He explains:

> Optimism merely reflects the desire that external circumstances may one day improve. There is nothing wrong with optimism, but we may not always have reasons for it. The theological virtue of hope is much more than optimism. Hope is based on the conviction that God is at work in our lives and in the world. Hope is ultimately a gift from God given to sustain us during difficult times. Charles Peguy described hope as the "little sister" that walks between the "taller sisters" of faith and charity; when the taller sisters grow tired, the little one instills new

[42] Boff and Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology*, 35.

> life and energy into the other two. Hope never allows our faith to grow weak or our love to falter.[43]

The type of hope that Gutierrez is describing is what Gary Gunderson and Larry Pray calls "informed hope" in their book, *Leading Causes of Life: Five Fundamentals to Change the Way You Live Your Life,* which is *"*hope that does not escape circumstance but transcend it."[44] Informed hope leads to life in a culture of death and liberation in a culture of exploitation. Gutierrez further expounds on the necessity of hope declaring:

> Hope does not exist in a moment; we must create hope. Hope is a gift, a grace, and when we receive a gift, it is for our neighbor. To welcome the grace of hope is to create resources in history. Theology [of hope] must be nothing more than a contribution to say to the poor person, 'Your condition could change, perhaps not tomorrow, but it is possible.' We must react against the idea that the poor are destined to live in an endless state of poverty by uniting with them as friends to criticize and to help change their present circumstances.[45]

This is hope that is grounded in connections, "connections humans make with their families, friends, neighbors, faith members and other fellow citizens."[46] A hermeneutic of liberation connects the life of Jesus with those who are hopelessly suffering and are oppressed. The circumstance surrounding Jesus' birth, ministry and death appeared to be hopeless. After being beat by life, abused by religious officials, condemned to die, and executed by government officials, Jesus still got up. His resurrection is hope that in the midst of suffering and oppression, life is still possible. No matter how implausible liberation and true freedom appears, Jesus is historical proof that there is hope!

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[43] Hartnett, "Remembering the Poor," https://www.americanmagazine.org/faith/2003/02/03/remebering-poor-interview-gustavo-gutierrez.

[44] Gary Gunderson and Larry Pray, *Leading Causes of Life: Five Fundamentals to Change the Way You Live Your Life* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2009), 11.

[45] Gutierrez, *A Hermeneutic of Hope*, 9.

[46] Gunderson and Pray, *Leading Causes of Life,* 65.

Conclusion

In a worship service during the General Conference of the United Methodist Church, James Cones expresses how his liberation work and writings emerged "from a deep theological conviction that the true power of the Christian gospel is its unambiguous call for liberation from the forces of oppression and a fierce and uncompromising condemnation of those who oppress."[47] This quote appropriately captures the essence and the purpose of Liberation Theology, which is to free the poor and the oppressed from any and every form of bondage.

Liberation Theology affirms that God is on the side of the poor and the oppressed. God is intimately concerned about "the least, the last, and the lost." Beginning with Moses leading Israel out of Egyptian religious, political, and physical bondage, and culminating with the suffering, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, liberation is a theme that reverberates throughout scripture. Biblical passages such as Matthew 25: 31-46 (feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the prisoner) and Luke 10:25-37 (compassionate and caring action toward our neighbors) speaks to the church's continuing obligation and responsibility to the poor and the oppressed. Any response to the poor must go beyond concern and criticism to include confrontation, commitment, and solidarity with the marginalized because God is at stake (in the response).

[47] James Cone, "The Cross and the Lynching Tree," Reconciling Ministries Network, The 2012 General Conference of the United Methodist Church in Tampa, FL, April 29, 2012, video, YouTube.

CHAPTER FIVE

INTERDISCIPLINARY FOUNDATIONS

This chapter will explore Community Development (as the non-church related field) and the Hope Theory (as the interdisciplinary theory) and their potential to assist this Doctor of Ministry project in engaging the community, developing, and implementing ministry programs/initiatives that lead to revitalization.

The remainder of this chapter will examine community/transformational development and the Hope Theory in detail. After providing a thorough overview, the role of community development and the Hope Theory and how they will function and impact the project will be explored. Lastly, this chapter will explore the dynamics between religion and science – conflict, independence, dialogue, or integration – related to the project's theme and goal.

The rhetorical question often asked when it comes to church and community relations, "If a church closes or leaves the community, will the community notice?" This question underscores the vital roles church engagement play in community life and well-being. The church should be a visible, vocal, and viable stakeholder in the community whose presence or absence should be equally impactful. Amidst the widening social justice disparities and the widening engagement gap between churches and distressed and declining communities, the church must return to its community and transformational

development roots to "reclaim its rightful place as the center for life and community transformation."[1]

Community development is "a professional discipline and is defined as a practice-based profession that promotes participative democracy, sustainable development, rights, economic opportunity, equality and social justice, through the organization, education and empowerment of people within their communities."[2] It involves collaborative effort between several actors, including government agencies, non-governmental agencies (NGO), churches, and communities, to cooperatively find solutions to problems that marginalize, disenfranchise, exploit, and oppress people within the community. Community development in practice "empowers and supports communities, of place and identity, to use their own assets to improve the quality of community life."[3] The goal of community development is social justice - holistic change or improvement by changing people and changing relationships.

The hope theory defines hope as "goals, pathways, and agency." It is "the perceived capability to derive pathways desired goals, and motivate oneself via agency thinking to use those pathways."[4] The hope theory reveals the dialogical and integrative nature of science and religion by presenting hope as both a spiritual virtue and a scientific phenomenon (positive psychology) that can be raised, lowered, and measured. Hope and

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[1] Joe W. Daniels Jr., *Walking with Nehemiah: Your Community Is Your Congregation* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2014), xiv.

[2] Alison Gilcrist and Marilyn Taylor, "Introduction," in *The Short Guide to Community Development*, 2nd ed. (Bristol, PA: Bristol University Press, 2006), 2, https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1t89ftd.4.

[3] SCDC, "What is Community Development?," SCDC, https://www.scdc.org.uk/who/what-is-community-development.

[4] C. R. Snyder, "Hope Theory: Rainbows in the Mind," *Psychological Inquiry* 13, no. 4 (2002): 249, https://jstor.org/stable/1448867.

the task of "raising" hope is relevant to any work directed toward change and transformation, because "higher hope consistently is related to better outcomes in academics, athletics, physical health, psychological adjustment, and psychotherapy."[5]

Development Studies

Community development is one of the many dimensions/disciplines of development that falls under the broader development studies umbrella. A multi and interdisciplinary field of social science, development study areas of interest are broad and comprehensive. A relatively new academic field of study, there are various meanings and ideas attached to the concept of "development," making it a complex and convoluted term. Ben Daley notes that development is a "political term with a range of meanings that depend on the context in which the word is used."[6] However, all development work (including community development) is synonymous in that it seeks change and to improve the human condition by alleviating and eradicating poverty.

Andrew Summer adds, "The term 'Development Studies' (DS) did not come into use until after World War II decolonization efforts, when newly independent states sought policy prescriptions to 'catch up' economically with the industrialized [Western] nations."[7] Due to colonial economics and politics of domination, exploitation, and subjugation, the socioeconomic disparities and inequities that existed between the

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[5] Snyder, "Hope Theory," 249, https://jstor.org/stable/1448867.

[6] Ben Daley, "Understanding Sustainable Development, Unit 1: The Challenge of Sustainable Development," University of London Centre for Development, Environment and Policy, https://www.soas.ac.uk/cedep-demos/000_P501_USD_K3736-Demo/unit1/page_12.htm#.

[7] Andrew Sumner, "What Is Development Studies?" *Development in Practice* 16, no. 6 (2006): 644-645, http://www.jstor.org/stable/4029921.

developed West and the underdeveloped South became a global concern, highlighting the theme of equality and equal access for all as a fundamental goal for developmental work.[8]

Jeremy Allouche and Alia Aghajanian further explains the initial context and thoughts framing the formation of development studies as follows:

> In the 1950's for various political reasons, colonial powers were concerned with the economic progress of the previous colonies. Initially this concerned was monopolized by economists and development economists, who had played a major role in the reconstruction of post-war Europe through the Marshall Plan. However, equating progress with economics became increasingly insufficient and limiting, and thus a new multidisciplinary branch of social science was born: development studies.[9]

Allouche and Aghajanian observe how initial theory and practices on development studies viewed economics as the primary means of and for development. This approach limited the reason for underdevelopment and the goal of development to economic growth (economics), dismissing other factors (spiritual, social, human agency, and educational) that contributed to the causes and possible solutions to poverty. The limitations of development as economics alone is reflected in the "continuing reinvention of ideas and approaches that explore the contributions psychology, religion/spirituality,

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[8] In development studies, the "West" and the "South" are political, cultural, and economic terms rather than a geographical one. The "West" refers to "the developed, capitalist, industrial countries generally aligned with NATO and the USA. The bloc of counties aligned with the United States after World War II, which had more or less common political and economic interests, included North America, Western Europe, Japan, South Korea, Australia, and some African countries because of their links with countries" (First, Second, and Third World. Nations Online. https://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/third_world_countries.htm). The "South" replaces the outdated term, Third World, and refers to "highly underdeveloped agriculture states characterized by high poverty, high child mortality, low economic and educational development, mainly located in African, Asian, and Latin American countries" (First, Second, and Third World).

[9] Jeremy Allouche and Alia Aghajanian, "Introduction: Development Studies – Past, Present and Future," *IDS Bulletin Transforming Development Knowledge* 47, no. 2 (May 2016): 3, https://doi.org/10.19088/1969-2016.128.

and other disciplines (in addition to economics) have to add to the conversation about development."[10]

Community Development

Viewed within the broader context of development studies, community development is:

> A professional discipline, and a practice-based profession that brings citizens, politicians, and professionals together to collectively generate solutions to existing problems and issues within communities. Community development also promotes human rights, equal opportunities, and social justice, through the organizing, educating, and empowering people within communities.[11]

Community development is a social justice-oriented process of creating conditions (politically, culturally, geographically, economically, educationally, environmentally) that enable growth, progress and the possibility for people to achieve their full human capacity/potential. Its practice is "rooted in a vision that the world should be a place of fairness and justice; where everyone is created equally significant and is worthy of mutual love, dignity, respect, and reciprocity."[12] The goal of community development is transformed lives and transformed relationships - the well-being or quality of life for all creation, including the environment.

Helpful in understanding community development and its goal of well-being, Bryant Meyers explains what Robert Chambers claim are basic to "responsible well-

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[10] Bryant L. Meyers, *Walking with the Poor: Principles and Practices of Transformational Development* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2014), 33.

[11] Kelechi Odimayo, "What is Community Development?," Legit, https://www.legit.ng/1208558-what-community-development.html.

[12] Margaret Ledwith, *Community Development in Action: Putting Freire into Practice* (Chicago, IL: Policy Press, 2016), 5.

being: livelihood security and the capabilities by which livelihood security and responsible well-being is achieved."[13] According to Meyers, Chambers describes livelihood security as: "adequate stocks and flows of food and cash to meet basic needs and to support well-being. Security refers to secure rights and reliable access to resources, food and income and basic series. It includes tangible and intangible assets to offset risk, ease shock and meet contingencies."[14] Livelihood security are the bare necessities (everyone should have access to), like affordable healthcare, access to nutritional food, and affordable housing. Capabilities refer to the skills and knowledge, what a person can or cannot do, that either positively or negatively impacts well-being. Subsequently, community development has the potential to and should be utilized to "enlarge a person's capabilities through learning, practice, training, and education, with the outcome being better living and well-being."[15] Livelihood security and capabilities exposes poverty, its causes and its consequences, as the major emphasis of community development practice, but they also provide helpful insight on how to better improve the quality of life.

Community Development and Poverty

Poverty is the biggest obstacle to development and better quality of life. Poverty, whether viewed as a deficit of resources (food, water, education) or a lack of access to resources and power structures, is a crime against humanity. Understanding the

[13] Meyers, *Walking with the Poor,* 165.

[14] Meyers, *Walking with the Poor,* 165.

[15] Meyers, *Walking with the Poor,* 165.

consequential dynamics between community development and poverty, Margaret Ledwith asserts:

> Social change (development) rests on a critical analysis of not who is poor, but why they are poor. Rich people have power over the lives of poor people; rich nations have power over the policies of poor nations. Social and economic structures support inequalities between rich and poor so that the rich get even rich (and more powerful) and the poor get ever poor and (less powerful) (Gunn).[16]

Poverty persists and is perpetuated through systems/structures that "places profits over people and through power relationships that work for the rich at the expense of the poor."[17] Robert Chambers describes how these types of power and relationship inequities results in varying dimensions of poverty in which the "poor are entangled in a cluster of disadvantages."[18] Meyers summarizes what Chambers calls "poverty traps" into the following respective categories:

> *Material poverty*: The household has few assets. It has very limited or no savings or livestock. Its housing and sanitation is inadequate. It has little or no land, and, if it has land, it cannot prove title to it. *Physical Weakness*: The household members are weak. They lack strength because of poor health and inadequate nutrition. The majority of the household are women, the very young, and the very old. *Isolation*: The household lacks access to social services and information. It is often remote – far from main roads, water lines, and even electricity. It lacks access to markets, capital, credit, and information. Children do not have access to quality education. *Vulnerability*: The household has almost no buffers against emergencies or disaster as it cannot afford to save. The family is vulnerable to cultural demands, such as dowry and feast days, that soak of savings. *Powerlessness*: The household lacks the ability and the knowledge to influence the life around it and the social systems in which it lives.[19]

Meyers adds spiritual poverty to Chambers' category of poverty traps to add a more Christian holistic perspective to understanding poverty. Spiritual poverty is:

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[16] Ledwith, *Community Development in Action*, 118.

[17] Ledwith, *Community Development in Action*, 2.

[18] Meyers, *Walking with the Poor*, 115.

[19] Meyers, *Walking with the Poor*, 115.

> Broke and dysfunctional relationships with God, each other, the community, and creation. Its members may suffer from spiritual oppression in the form of fear of spirits, demons, and angry ancestors. They may lack hope and be unable to believe that change is possible. They may never have heard the gospel or have only responded to a truncated version of the gospel that lacks transforming power.[20]

Robert Chambers' analysis of poverty is helpful in correctly identifying it as a complex and interrelated phenomenon /problem. Poverty is the result of multiple factors that are linked in ways that reinforces the others and that "results in greater and increasingly intractable poverty."[21] Any attempts to address "poverty entanglements must take a holistic approach, addressing every area poverty is present and every area of life poverty impacts (political, social, spiritual, economic, and education). The discipline of community development provides the holistic framework necessary for confronting the complexities of poverty. It brings faith-based organizations, the community, and governmental agencies together in a collaborative effort, combining policy prescriptions and programs with grassroots ministry to produce communal change and transformation.

Approaches to Community Development

There are various approaches to the concept of community development which include the following:

> Community Engagement. This approach is focused on facilitating understanding, exchange of information to build social capital and enhance social outcomes through a decision-making process. Community Capacity Building: It is concerned with helping communities in obtaining, strengthening, and maintaining the ability to set and achieve their own development goals. Sustainable development is aimed at achieving, in a balanced way, economic community development and environmental protection outcomes. Community-driven development (CDD), and economic community development approach that

[20] Meyers, *Walking with the Poor*, 115.

[21] Meyers, *Walking with the Poor*, 115.

> moves an emphasis form the activity of central government to local communities. Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) is a method that seeks to use the strengths of the community as a means for its stable development. Faith-based community development is known to utilize faith-based communities to cause community development increase. Community-based participatory research (CBRP) is an approach to the research that brings together the efforts of the community members and researchers in the research of the community life and problems. All the partners are expected to contribute the expertise, integrate and share their knowledge to make the process of decision making easier and more effective. Community Organizing is an approach assuming that social change involves conflicts and social struggles that can be a way to generate collective power for the powerless people.[22]

Successful and effective community development is not limited to one approach and often uses a combination of approaches. This project will utilize community engagement, asset-based community development, and community organizing as approaches to address the project's problem of a lack of church and community engagement. These approaches avoid the common mistake made by many community development programs of reducing development work to charity. Sandhya Jha explains how "a charity model pays attention to the needs of a client and sometimes unintentionally or unconsciously focuses on his/her limitations or failing" rather than the strengths, gifts, and talents they potentially bring to the development table.[23] Most communities have untapped potential and overlooked resources that this project intends to bring to bear (through assets mapping and strength-based assessments) in assisting and empowering the context for transformation and renewal – holistic well-being.

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[22] Odimayo, "What is Community Development?" https://www.legit.ng/1208558-what-community-development.html.

[23] Sandhya Rani Jha, *Transforming Communities: How People Like You Are Healing Their Neighborhoods* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2017), 12.

Pastor Joseph Daniels, Jr. concept of "community as the congregation" will guide the project's community development efforts in facilitating community change and transformation. Daniels suggests as churches:

> We must see the corner store and its owners, Ms. Campbell, as our classroom and treat Ms. Campbell as a cherished member, whether she belongs to our church or not. We must see Mr. Taylor, the principal, and his elementary school as an extension campus. We must persuade the mayor of our town, Ms. Kelley, to be a collaborative partner in the rebuilding of broken parts of our neighborhood.[24]

This approach will not only address the problem with church and community connection/engagement, but it will also create and foster relationships of trust, mutuality, and respect necessary to develop ministries and initiatives conducive for holistic improvement. Making the community a part of the extended congregation creates the relational proximity necessary to effectively address the poverty traps and present needs of the community.

Hope Theory

Formulated by positive psychologist, C. R. Snyder, describes the hope theory as a measurable science in terms of "goals, pathways (way power), and agency (willpower)." Goals are integral to understanding the hope theory and the hoping process. A life of hope is goal-oriented and is the ability to set, believe and achieve goals. A goal can be defined as:

> Anything that an individual desire to experience, create, get, do, become, or [stop as in a bad or unhealthy habit]. As such, a goal may be significant, life-long pursuit (e.g., developing a comprehensive theory of human motivation) or it may be mundane and brief (e.g., getting a ride to school). Goals also may vary in terms

[24] Daniels, *Walking with Nehemiah*, xiii.

> of having anywhere from very low to very high perceived probabilities of attainment.[25]

Snyder highlights how some writers, "place restraints on what constitutes a legitimate goal for the hoping process."[26] These writers, such as R. S. Lazarus, suggest, "A fundamental condition of hope is that our current life circumstance is unsatisfactory – that is it involves deprivation or is damaging or threatening; goals that fill a profound void in a person' life."[27] While many examples of hope fit into this category, there are four other goal categories that are legitimate for hope/hoping, which are maintenance goals (daily life goals or agendas), enhancement goals (goals that go beyond what is satisfactory to something new), approach goals (moving toward getting something accomplished), and avoidance goals (preventing something from happening).[28]

The hope theory, according to Snyder, "reflects individuals' perceptions regarding their capacities to (1) clearly conceptualize goals, (2) develop the specific strategies to reach those goals (pathways thinking), and (3) initiate and sustain the motivation for using those strategies (agency thinking) to attain goals."[29] Based on this definition, Katie Hanson divides the hope theory into four categories:[30]

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[25] C. R. Snyder et al., "Hope Theory, Measurements, and Applications to School Psychology," *School Psychology Quarterly* 18, no. 2 (2003): 123, https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/be56/(ab6ba56c65e98b12d2afd19ee270c8a9fab.pdf.

[26] Snyder, "Hope Theory," 250.

[27] Snyder, "Hope Theory," 250.

[28] The definition of maintenance and enhancement goals were taken from Snyder, "Hope Theory: A Rainbow in the Mind," 250. Approach goals and avoidance goal were taken from Snyder et al., "Hope Theory, Measurements, and Applications to School Psychology," 129.

[29] Snyder et al., "Hope Theory," 122-123, https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/be56/(ab6ba56c65e98b12d2afd19ee270c8a9fab.pdf.

[30] Katie Hanson, "What Exactly is Hope and How Can You Measure It?" PositivePsychology.org.uk, 2, http://positivepsychology.org.uk/hope-theory-snyder-adult-scale/.

1. Goals that are valuable and uncertain are described by Snyder as the anchors of hope theory as they provide direction and an endpoint for hopeful thinking.
2. Pathway thoughts refer to the routes we take to achieve our desired goals and the individual's perceived ability to produce these routes.
3. Agency thoughts refer to the motivation we have to undertake the routes towards our goals.
4. Barriers block the attainment of our goals and in the event of a barrier we can either give up or we can use our pathway thoughts to create new routes.

Hope is "a positive motivational state that is based on an interactively derived sense of successful (a) agency (goal-directed energy), and (b) pathways (planning to meet goals)."[31] The hope theory expands the notion of hope from being "just" a spiritual virtue or an abstract emotion, feeling, or a wish. Hope is positive cognition that leads to positive behavior necessary for goal attainment.

In *Hope Rising: How the Science of Hope Can Change Your Life*, Casey Gwinn and Chan Hellman further explain the hope theory using a minivan analogy.[32] In this analogy, goals are equated to the destination of a journey. Every trip, like goals, should have an end in mind or a desired destination. Pathways are the routes/directions that lead to the destination (goals). Pathways are important because they determine how, when, or if you make it to the destination. In this sense, pathways are maps that guide, as well as prevent people from getting lost along the way. Agency is the engine that power pathways. When encountering obstacles, adversity, or setbacks, agency is the fuel

[31] Snyder, "Hope Theory," 250, https://www.jstor.org/stable/1448867.

[32] Casey Gwinn and Chan Hellman, *Hope Rising: How the Science of Hope Can Change Your Life* (New York, NY: Morgan James Publishing, 2019), 12.

(motivation and momentum that must be replenished) that keeps the minivan going and on track until it reaches the goals.

According to the hope theory, there are varying levels of hope thought ranging from "high hope individuals" to "low hope individuals." Hope is a "key determinant in helping survive, endure, overcome and flourish out of the most difficult circumstances."[33] Hope levels are also predictors of (a person's) outlook and outcomes (in life). Gwinn and Hellman explain:

> The research shows that people with high hope do better in life than those with low hope. High hope helps us overcome trauma better than low. High hope helps people deal with losing their ability to walk better than low hope. High hope helps people do better in surviving cancer than low hope. High hope helps people do better in school than low hope. High hope helps people make better employees than low hope. High hope helps people navigate their way through natural disasters better than low hope. Higher hope is better than lower hope.[34]

Research has shown the higher the hope, as opposed to low hope, the more likely a person is to display positive attitudes, overcome obstacles, produce alternative goal pathways, and experience well-being in the areas of health, education, and work.

Although some writers dismiss hope as "too vague and useless," the hope theory teaches that hope is a measurable cognitive tool that can be taught, raised, and lowered. Led by C. R. Snyder, researchers have developed several measurement instruments to assess hope levels, pathway, and agency thoughts. These instruments include: The Adult Dispositional Hope Scale, The Adult State Hope Scale, The Adult Domain Specific Hope Scale, and the Children's Hope Scale (for children thirteen and under) and are designed to measure and score agency and pathway levels. Building off the criticism and

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[33] Gwinn and Hellman, *Hope Rising*, 17.

[34] Gwinn and Hellman, *Hope Rising*, 17.

drawbacks of the Adult Dispositional and Hope Specific Hope Scales, The Adult State Hope Scale:

> Assesses goal directed thinking in any given moment or situation. This scale is a six item self-report questionnaire that is designed to tap into state hope in adults. The scale has three agency items and three pathway items. Items are scored using an 8 point Likert scale and scores are created for overall hope by summing all the items and by summing the even numbered items to get an agency score and all the odd-numbered items to get a pathway score… Total hope scores range from 6 to 48 and subscale scores range from 3 to 24 with high scores representing high hope.[35]

Identifying or measuring a person's hope level is beneficial not only because it can help predict outcomes and achievements, but also because additional support can be directed toward those who are low in hope.[36] Low hope individuals are less likely to have goals, possess the pathway or agency thinking to overcome barriers to goal attainment, and less likely to experience well-being in life.

The Hope Theory and Transformational Development

One of the consequences of a lack of church and community engagement and connection is hopelessness, ill-being, and livelihood insecurity. Hopelessness is a profound sense of dejection and resignation about life situations, where there seems to be no possibility of things improving or getting better. Hopeless people are goalless people; people who have lost their ability to set, believe and achieve goals.

The hope theory reveals that hopeless behaviors, attitudes, and emotions are learned, and according to the hope theory, they can be "raised" or unlearned through positive hope enhancement. One of the ways the hope theory has shaped this project is by

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[35] Hanson, "What Exactly is Hope and How Can You Measure It," 6.

[36] Hanson, "What Exactly is Hope and How Can You Measure It," 2.

helping to understand the connection between hope, goals, and transformation. This relationship entails helping low hope individuals set concrete goals, clarify, and transform existing goals into "doable" goals, and building and rebuilding agency and pathways.[37] One of the major aims of this project is to help low hope individuals identify and set goals in the areas of finances, health, and education – three of the most pressing areas of need in the community. People who measure as low hope will be exposed to the following agency and pathway enhancements:

> Learning self-talk about succeeding. Thinking of difficulties encountered as reflecting wrong strategy, not lack of talent. Thinking of goals and setbacks as challenges, not failures. Recalling past successes. Hearing stories of how other people have succeeded (e.g., movies, tapes, books). Cultivating friends with whom you can talk about goals. Finding role models that you can emulate (everyday heroes are closer than you think). Exercising physically (learning that the body and mind are connected). Eating properly (remembering that you need fuel). Resting adequately (recharging for her next active goal-directed output). Laughing at oneself (especially when stuck). Re-goaling (persistence in the face of absolute goal blockage deflates agency and pathways). Rewarding oneself for small sub-goal attainments on the way to larger, long-term goals. Educating oneself for specific skills, as well as learning how to learn."[38]

These enhancements not only "gets the human hope machine moving," they also may produce more "positive interactions and goal oriented outcomes."[39] Low hope individuals do not have to settle for lives lower and lesser than God intends. The hope theory is scientific proof that hope can be measured, raised, and be the ultimate catalyst for life-change and well-being.

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[37] C. R. Snyder, "Conceptualizing, Measuring, and Nurturing Hope," *Journal of Counseling and Development* 73, no. 3 (March 1995): 358, https://doi.org/0.1002/j.1556-6676.1995.tb01764.x.

[38] Snyder, "Conceptualizing, Measuring, and Nurturing Hope," 358-359, https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6676.1995.tb01764.x.

[39] Snyder, "Conceptualizing, Measuring and Nurturing Hope," 359, https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6676.1995.tb01764.x.

Community Development, Hope Theory and the Foundational Papers

The social justice overtones of this project seamlessly tie community development and the hope theory together with the other foundational chapters. Jesus' ministry approach in Luke 4:14-21, The Social Gospel Movement, and Liberation (poverty, oppression, the poor concern: the spiritual and social are related) Theology are all aimed at transformational development – holistically and positively impacting every area of life (spiritual, social, economically, and educationally). Proponents of the Social Gospel Movement, such as Walter Rauschenberg, and advocates of Liberation Theology like, Gustavo Gutierrez, combined spiritual and social concern for the poor, the oppressed and the marginalized with compassionate advocacy. They believed that the church not only had a spiritual responsibility, but the church also had a social obligation to address the systems and structures that caused people to live less than God intended.

Jesus' ministry objectives of "*preaching* good news to the poor, *recovery* of sight for the blind, *release* of the prisoners, and *relief/redemption* to the economically disadvantaged (by observing biblical Jubilee), are examples of both transformational development and "raising" hope (the hope theory). These transformational development and hope elements are present in the work. The Jesus of scripture is a "change agent" and a "hope dealer." Through prophetic practice, preaching, and witnessing (pathways and agency), Jesus confronts hopelessness on every level, raises hope, and holistically transforms everything he encounters, including people and places. Whether restoring sight to the blind (Jn. 9:1-12, Mk. 10:46-52), feeding multiple masses in the desert with limited resources (Matt. 14:13-21), raising the dead to life (Jn. 11:1-44, Mk. 5:22-43) or converting an entire Samaritan city (Jn. 4:39-42), Jesus never left conditions,

circumstances, or situations the way he found them. He left them changed and transformed for the better.

The Relationship Between Science and Religion

The relationship between religion and science is an ongoing highly contested and contentious debate that ultimately depends on a person's worldview. A worldview is the lens through which the world is seen and interpreted. It is how "we make sense out of our world and includes our assumptions about how the world works."[40] Dr. Annick de Witt identifies the following dominant worldviews, modern, traditional, postmodern, and integrative.

The modern worldview sees "the spiritual/religious and the material/physical realms as separate and distinct from one another."[41] People with modern worldviews see the world as a dichotomy: the world of God and religion and the world of science and technology. According to de Witt, "people with modem worldviews tend to emphasize rationality, science, logic, and critical thinking, and they often question imposed views from (religious) traditions and the past."[42] Science is seen through this viewpoint as "the ultimate and sometimes even exclusive source of reliable knowledge: it is the way to find out what is real and true."[43]

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[40] Meyers, *Walking with the Poor*, 5.

[41] Meyers, *Walking with the Poor*, 5.

[42] Annick de Witt, "Twenty First Century Worldviews," Transformational Learning Opportunities, https://transformationallearningopportunities.com/worldviews-mindsets-2.

[43] de Witt, "Twenty First Century Worldviews," https://transformationallearningopportunities.com/worldviews-mindsets-2.

Unlike the modern worldview, the traditional worldview does not see religion as separate and unrelated to the material world, but as a "seamless and interrelated whole."[44] Rather than placing emphasis on science and technology, proponents of the traditional worldview "tend to find their answers to the great questions of life in longstanding traditions and conventions, often centered on their religious faith."[45]

As the name implies, postmodernism marks a departure from modernistic views and thoughts. Annick de Witt explains:

> People with postmodern worldviews tend to acknowledge and value multiple perspectives on reality. They are aware that people see life very differently, and that all these different perspectives are valuable. In this view, truth is thus relative, contextual and subjective (e.g., informed by moral, emotional, and artistic dimensions), rather than being objective as modern sciences claims. They view of reality is diverse and undefined, characterized by uncertainty and ambiguity. The postmodern's capacity to see and validate multiple perspectives can lead to and intense relativism, in which reality or truth itself is contested: because we all have a different perspective on reality, reality in itself does not exist. Frequently, these people either adhere to a liberal (interpretation of their) religion or spirituality, or display an agnostic attitude, saying that 'we don't know' whether there is a divine being, force, or reality.[46]

Postmodern worldviews are diverse and critical of and in opposition to modernistic views of society and its "emphasis on material progress, modern science, and technology."[47] For postmodernism, quality of life is a social justice fight for well-being that should be waged on behalf of everyone regardless of race, religion, gender, or sexual identity.

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[44] Meyers, *Walking with the Poor*, 7.

[45] de Witt, "Twenty First Century Worldviews," https://transformationallearningopportunities.com/worldviews-mindsets-2.

[46] de Witt, "Twenty First Century Worldviews," https://transformationallearningopportunities.com/worldviews-mindsets-2.

[47] de Witt, "Twenty First Century Worldviews," https://transformationallearningopportunities.com/worldviews-mindsets-2.

The last worldview that de Witt identifies in her analysis is the integrative worldview. This is a holistic worldview that attempts to:

> Integrate and synthesize elements or domains that in other worldviews ae viewed as mutually exclusive, such as science and spirituality, rationality and imagination, economy and ecology, humanity and nature – domains that in the West have been in conflict for centuries. In this worldview, opposing perspectives or domains are understood 'on a deeper level' to be part of a greater whole or synthesis.[48]

The integrative worldview views reality as a combination of the spiritual and physical. It is an attempt to reconcile intellect, rationality, and science with spirituality. This interpretation of the world "results in a 'both-and" rather than "either or" thinking, which can lead to great social, cultural, economic, and technological innovations."[49]

In addition to the four worldviews, Ian Barbour, a longtime professor in physics and religion, presents four models that clarify the interaction or relation(s) between science and religion. The four models are conflict, independence, dialogue, and integration.

The conflict model ascribes an either-or approach; either science is true or either religion is true, rendering the other false. The second model, independence, "states that science and religion can both be true as long they are kept to their separate domains."[50] Both science and religion can be true in that "science tells us what and religion tells us

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[48] de Witt, "Twenty First Century Worldviews," https://transformationallearningopportunities.com/worldviews-mindsets-2.

[49] de Witt, "Twenty First Century Worldviews," https://transformationallearningopportunities.com/worldviews-mindsets-2.

[50] Justin Topps, "Science and Religion: Barbour's 4 Models," A Biologist View of Science and Theology, https://scienceandtheology.wordpress.com/2010/11/11/science-and-religion-barbours-4-models.

why."[51] For both science and religion to be true, they stay in their perspective spaces independent of one another. The dialogue model brings science and religion together as conversation partners. They each bring "their unique knowledge and expertise to enrich the other."[52] Finally, the integration model builds on the dialogue model. It integrates truth and science into "a more complete or full whole – without science we only understand God and His creation in part; without Christianity we understand the universe and God in part."[53] This model asserts that world is best understood (holistically) when the truths and strengths of both science and religion are in continual conversation with one another.

Worldviews and understanding the relationship between science and religion is important because they determine understanding about community development as well as approaches to community development. Based on Barbour's four models, this project will employ the integration model in utilizing community development and the Hope Theory to address the project's problem of a lack of church and community engagement and the overall goal of transformational development. According to Bruce Meyer, "The development conversation has not generally involved the domains of psychology and religion/spirituality until very recently. Often religion was considered part of the problem of poverty and thus surely could not be part of the solution."[54] Meyer goes on to

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[51] Topps, "Science and Religion," https://scienceandtheology.wordpress.com/2010/11/11/science-and-religion-barbours-4-models.

[52] Bruce Martin, "Science and Faith Today: Conflict, Independence, Dialogue; Integration, or…?," Rossway.net, https://rossway.net/science-and-faith-today-conflict-or-collaboration/.

[53] Martin, "Science and Faith Today," https://rossway.net/science-and-faith-today-conflict-or-collaboration/.

[54] Meyer, *Walking with the Poor*, 33.

describe how the international development community, "who are generally modern secularists suspicious of religion," increasingly look to faith-based organizations to assist in developmental work. Alvis Vidal also notes the increasing trend of "policymakers looking to churches, synagogues, mosques, and other faith-based organizations to play a greater role in strengthening communities."[55]

This project brings community development and the hope theory together in an integrative way. Community development is rooted in the ministry of Jesus and the continuing work of the church, and it has benefited from the field of science. According to the hope theory, hope is more than a spiritual virtue or a spiritual discipline. Hope is a scientific tool that can be used to help transform people and communities. They are important to the conversation about effective development.

Conclusion

In many contexts (rural and urban), churches are the social, economic/entrepreneurial, educational, and health "life-lines" in and to communities. Houses of faith and worship, especially in African American communities, have historically served as communal centers of resources, empowerment, and development. Often the most stable institutions in distressed and declining communities and despite economic and other resource constraints, churches have "faithfully served their

[55] Alvis C. Vidal, "Faith-Based Organizations in Community Development," U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Office of Policy Development and Research, 1, https:/www.huduser.gov/portal/publications/faithbased.pdf.

neighborhoods as centers of celebration and rejuvenation," positively impacting the community through holistic ministry and multidimensional outreach.[56]

Lloyd Gite acknowledges the impact and vital role churches play in the "Black" community when stating, "Dating back to slavery, the black church has been an epicenter for spurring social, political, and economic self-help among its congregants and extending out into the community."[57] Due mainly to Blacks' historical marginalization through White supremacy and other forms of oppression, rendering them (Blacks) "relatively powerless in American society," Black churches operated and continues to exist as havens of hope and help, leading the fight for social justice, social change, social improvement, and development.[58] From the Abolitionist and Civil Rights Movements to the current Black Lives Matter Movement, the (Black) church has been a power base for Black empowerment. Through the work community development and by being embodiments and extensions of hope, the church has been instrumental in advocating and affecting change for "the least, the lost, and the left behind."

The church remains a significant potential vehicle in "getting things done in and for communities."[59] However, to remain relevant and efficacious, the church must

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[56] Diane Winston, "Churches Endure as Havens of Hope," *Progressions (Lilly Endowment*) 4 (February 1992): 1, https://search-ebscohost-com.utsdayton.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true=&db=rfh&AN=ATLA0000849186&site=ehost-live.

[57] Lloyd Gite, "The New Agenda of the Black Church: Economic Development for Black America; Black Churches Are Flexing Their Economic Muscles to Provide Much Needed Jobs and Businesses – From Shopping Centers to Senior Citizen Housing," *Black Enterprise* (December 1993): 56, Questia, http://www.questia.com/read/1G1-14680366/the-new-agenda-of-the-black-church-economic-development.

[58] Lawrence N. Jones, "The Black Churches: A New Agenda," Religion Online, https://www.religion-online.org/article/the-black-churches-a-new-agenda/.

[59] Winston, "Churches Endure as Havens of Hope," 1, https://search-ebscohost-com.utsdayton.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true=&db=rfh&AN=ATLA0000849186&site=ehost-live.

overcome what Joe Daniels describes as "one of the greatest challenges to the church in the twenty-first century – the lack of connection to the community."[60] He explains, "Far too many churches have become drive-in spiritual social clubs and not the agents of community vitality and life transformation they used to be. As a result, communities are suffering, churches are dying, and far too many people are searching for hope in the wrong places."[61] Many contemporary congregations are comprised of "commuter" congregations who have adopted "drive-in and drive-out" mentalities and who see no need for community engagement, involvement, or development.

Faithful adherence to the Great Commission to "go, teach, make, and emulate" Christ (transformational ministry) requires community development to be an ongoing emphasis of the church's evangelistic and discipleship aims. Jesus is clear in scripture that he comes to provide the hope of "life and life more abundantly" (Jn. 10:10). The church must develop ministries (pathways and agency) designed to engage and produce the type of life Jesus intends (transformational change) in the community through social justice advocacy, addressing economic, educational, and health disparities, problems plaguing the community that often leads to permeations of hopelessness. In leading communities in and to change through innovative and holistic ministry, the church becomes a beacon of hope and a center for transformational community development, signaling and embodying the possibility that a better and brighter life and future is possible.

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[60] Daniels Jr., *Walking with Nehemiah*, xi.

[61] Daniels Jr., *Walking with Nehemiah*, xi.

CHAPTER SIX

PROJECT ANALYSIS

The purpose of the research project was to design a model of transformational evangelism that would equip the leaders and the laity to engage the community in holistic ways that would aid in the revitalization of the context and surrounding community. In declining and distressed rural contexts, the local church often serves as the best option for instilling "hope" and facilitating transformation and revitalization in the community. From the research project perspective, evangelism is an instrument of hope and a tool of help (development). In attempting to create and implement a holistic evangelism plan, the four foundational papers (biblical, historical, theological, and interdisciplinary) support the notion that through transformational (holistic) evangelism, the local church is one of the options to facilitate community transformation and development. Evangelism is not only one of the most practical ways to engage the community, but it is also one of the most powerful.

Biblical Perspective

In desiring to create and implement a transformational (holistic) evangelism plan, Luke 4:14-19 was used as the biblical foundation. The passage states in part: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the

oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (4:18-19, NRSV). This passage reveals Jesus as both the teacher and example of what and how holistic evangelism should look. Jesus' approach to evangelism is prophetic and practical, and the writer of Luke presents Jesus' life and ministry in a manner that widens the scope of evangelism to be inclusive of more than just a verbal proclamation of the gospel. In an article titled, "Holistic Evangelism: The Case for a Broadened Evangelistic Approach," Pedrito Maynard-Reid supports Jesus being the blueprint for an expanded and holistic understanding of evangelism by stating:

> The student of scripture should look at the full picture painted by the Gospels and Acts, which portrays Jesus and the apostles not merely as a prepositional evangelist, but as situational evangelistic missionaries. Their evangelism was not merely the oral communication of some prepositional truth but situational activities that aimed to bring about wholeness. Their evangelistic approach involved preaching and healing, teaching and acting out their message.[1]

Evangelism exemplified in the life and ministry of Jesus is both word and deed, preaching and practice, and proclamation and demonstration. Jesus dispels the notion that evangelism should be confined to religious activity behind the four walls of the sanctuary or restricted to what "church folk" do on Wednesdays or Sundays. For Jesus, evangelism is "holistic, multidimensional, and all encompassing. It includes reaching the inner life of the individual, while extending beyond the individual soul to all society."[2] Luke 4:14-19 supports a view and understanding of evangelism that should be created and implemented in a manner that brings relief to the poor, release to the imprisoned and those in bonds,

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[1] Pedrito Maynard-Reid, "Holistic Evangelism: The Case for a Broadened Evangelistic Approach," Ministry International Journal for Pastors, https://ministrymagazine.org/arichive/2000/05/holistic-evangelism#note1.

[2] Maynard-Reid, "Holistic Evangelism," https://ministrymagazine.org/arichive/2000/05/holistic-evangelism#note1.

restoration and recovery to those who have been socially, politically or economically abused.

Luke's theme of inclusive salvation and concern for the poor, the outcasts, and those on the margins of society provides the church with the necessary motivation and mandate for evangelism being an instrument of social justice and community development. Jesus presents the kingdom of God as a hospital where people can come and get healed and helped by Spirit-filled believers. The church is not a courtroom where people are disqualified from care, because of their past, ethnicity, race, or gender. When asked, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinner?" (Lk. 5:30). Jesus answered, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have come to call not the righteous but sinners to repentance" (Lk. 5:31-32). Just as Jesus was the messianic hope for the poor, blind, oppressed, and captives in scripture, the church must provide hope in the form a viable evangelistic ministry strategy for those oppressed and held captive by social and economic inequalities and disparities. When biblically based evangelism is created, and implemented, it moves the church beyond ministry comfort zones and leads the church into the margins of society helping people be all that God has called them to be.

Historical Perspective

The Social Gospel Movement is the historical event most relatable and best supports creating and implementing a holistic plan of evangelism necessary for community revitalization and development. The Social Gospel Movement was a prominent Protestant Christian movement in the early twentieth century. It was the

church's effort to use scripture as a model and a mandate to address sinful structures and societal ills/social problems. The proper interpretation of scriptures like Micah 6:8, and Luke 4:18-19, supports a "social view" of the Gospel. As a result, the church should always be moving evangelistically in the direction of social change and reform.

In the book *The Kingdom Is Always Coming*, Christopher Evans uses the words of Walter Rauschenbusch to establish the relationship between evangelism and social activism. He writes, "Rauschenbusch took aim at those who saw Christian evangelism merely as a matter of "personal conversion."[3] Evans adds, "Rauschenbusch argues, what was [is] needed in the church was a new model of evangelism that would bring persons in touch with the nation's social and economic sins caused by the late-nineteenth-century industrialization."[4] For Walter Rauschenbusch and other proponents of the social gospel, addressing social issues and advocating for social justice is not optional for the church but a fundamental part of the church's mission.

Scripture clarifies that the Social Gospel is a biblical mandate and an extension of the Christian faith. The Social Gospel teaches that the church is supposed to be an instrument of hope by constantly reminding the poor, the oppressed, the outcasts, and the marginalized of the promises that come with being citizens of God's kingdom. A proper social-economic understanding of the gospel is critical to any context but is especially critical to the research project's current context. In a small rural town that lacks jobs and resources, Kingdom Movement Community must model a holistic evangelistic ministry to instill hope and fill in the community's social, economic, and educational voids.

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[3] Christopher H. Evans, *The Kingdom Is Always Coming: A Life of Walter Rauschenbusch* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2004), xxvi.

[4] Evans, *The Kingdom Is Always Coming*, xxvi.

Theological Perspective

The field of theology used to support the holistic and transformational aims of the project is Liberation Theology. Liberation Theology initially began as a Catholic Latin American Movement in the 1960s. It used scripture as motivation and justification to address social, economic, and political oppressive conditions. Liberating people from all forms of oppression, including systematic and structural oppression, lie at the heart of Liberation Theology. Liberation Theology aligns with the project because it speaks to the church's continuing obligation and responsibility to liberate the marginalized, the poor, and the oppressed. Using scriptural references like the foundational passage (Lk. 4:14-21), Matthew 25: 31-46 (feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the prisoner), and Luke 10:25-37 (compassionate and caring action toward our neighbors), the project will develop evangelism strategies that offer hope, healing, and help in a ministry context impacted by oppressive social and economic disparities.

Interdisciplinary Perspective

The interdisciplinary field that supports this research project is community development. In *Reclaiming Rural: Building Thriving Rural Congregations*, Allen Stanton broadly describes community development as "any number of activities that improve life within the community whether through directly improving people's economic conditions or health or by supporting initiatives that add cultural enrichment."[5] Community development recognizes the church as a significant stakeholder in the

[5] Allen Stanton, *Reclaiming Rural: Building Thriving Rural Congregations* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2021), 54.

community and its potential to create meaningful change in declining and distressed contexts. Through creative and contextually designed evangelism, churches can be the social, economic, and entrepreneurial, educational, and health "life-lines" in and to communities, especially in contexts with limited access to life sustaining resources. From creating after school tutoring and mentoring programs for at-risk youth and establishing food banks for food insecure residents, community development is one aspect of how this research project aims to revitalize the context.

The theory used to support the research project is the Hope Theory. The Hope Theory was founded by "positive" psychologist C. R. Snyder and defines hope as a measurable goal-oriented cognitive science that can be lowered or raised. Snyder developed several scales to measure hope, which identified people as either low hope or high hope. Understanding hope and how to maintain and raise hope is relatable to this project because the church is often called to be hope and raise hope in hopeless settings. According to research, hope matters because "people with high hope do better in life than those with low hope."[6] Jesus is clear in scripture that he comes to provide the hope of "life and life more abundantly" (Jn. 10:10). As an extension of Jesus' ministry and mission, the church must develop ministries designed to engage and produce the type of life Jesus intends (transformational change) in the community through social justice advocacy, addressing economic, educational, and health disparities, and other problems plaguing the community that often leads to permeations of hopelessness. In leading communities in and to change through innovative and holistic ministry, the church becomes a beacon of hope and a center for transformational community development,

[6] Casey Gwinn and Chan Hellman, *Hope Rising: How Science of Hope Can Change Your life* (New York, NY: Morgan James Publishing, 2019), 17.

signaling and embodying the possibility that a better and brighter life and future is possible.

Methodology

This section of the project will describe the process of soliciting and recruiting volunteers for the research project. A detailed description of the approach to collecting data and the reasoning for using the selected methodologies will be provided. Participants for the research project were selected from the Kingdom Movement Community Church's membership, with several members of the Executive Worship Committee (EWC), on a voluntary basis. The EWC consisted of the following personnel: Director of Worship, Director of Christian Education, Director of Hospitality, Director of Media, and Director of Evangelism and Outreach. This committee was preferable for the research project because of the roles and influences these individuals held in the church. Many of the targeted participants were college educated, currently employed, and were men and women aged twenty-five or older. No one on the EWC or participant pool belonged to a vulnerable or protected class.

An interest meeting was held after a 10:00 a.m. Sunday worship service at Kingdom Movement Community Church forty-five days prior to the start of the project soliciting volunteer participation, outlining details of the project, anticipated start date, expected time commitment (once a week from one to two hours for seven weeks). A recruitment flyer was also posted in the church and emailed to potential volunteers reiterating the project description and outlining participation requirements as follows: you must be eighteen year of age or older to participate and not in a protected or vulnerable

class. Participation is solely voluntary, and participants may leave the research group at any time. The importance of confidentiality was stressed with the participants indicating that no names or any other identifying descriptions would be used. After identifying and gaining commitment from the volunteers, they were instructed to fill out participation forms twenty days prior to the start of the project. Names, contact information, and confidentiality clauses were collected, and participants were assigned numbers (one through twelve) for identification instead of names. The final research group consisted of eleven members. One participant withdrew from the project due to relocation.

Other security measures were implemented to ensure confidentiality in collecting, securely storing, recording, and disposing of the research information. The following steps were taken:

1. A pre-questionnaire and pre-Adult Hope Scale survey was administered at the beginning of the project and the post-questionnaire and post Adult Hope Scale survey at the conclusion of the project. All collected information was placed in a folder and securely kept in a locked file cabinet at Kingdom Movement Community Church. Collected information will remain under lock and file until the five-year period of data retention is over. The information will then be disposed by shredding.
2. No participant involved in the research project was in a protected class or part of a vulnerable population. All participants were eighteen years of age or older.
3. All participants signed confidentiality clauses not to disclose name or any other information about the research project with other individuals.

4. In describing encounters or experiences with others, the following systems/descriptions were implemented instead of specific names or places: a family member, a church member, a member of the community, a member outside of the community, a place within the community, or a place outside of the project community.
5. Journal entries that had identifying information or details were replaced with nondescript replacements.

A mixed-method qualitative study was implemented utilizing four data collection instruments. First, a pre- and post-survey was utilized to gauge the participants' general knowledge about evangelism using open-ended questions. The same survey was given after the project's conclusion to determine the participants' growth, the lack of growth, or any discernible changes in skill and knowledge after the research interventions. This research method was chosen, because it was a great tool to gather valuable information from the participants and to evaluate their knowledge and skill level on the research question.

The following questions were asked on the pre- and post-survey: 1) How would you define evangelism? This question was asked to determine a baseline for the participants' knowledge of evangelism and to identify any skills they associate with evangelism. 2) What is an example of evangelism? This was another question designed to determine the participants' knowledge of evangelism. It was also helpful to determine how the participants viewed evangelism: whether they viewed evangelism as verbal proclamation only or as a combination of proclamation and demonstration. 3) Do you believe in evangelism as a spiritual component? If so, why? This question was designed

to see if participants understood evangelism as a spiritual obligation of the church. Since the aim of this research project is to engage the community in transformative ways through evangelism, assessing the participants' thoughts on church and community engagement was important. 4) What is the character of a person willing to engage in evangelism? This question is designed to identify what character traits and skills the participants associated with evangelism. 5) Having identified the character of a person who evangelizes, do you possess any of these characteristics? If so, what are they? This question is designed to identify any evangelism skills and characteristics present in the participants. 6) What are the consequences of a church not evangelizing the community? This question is designed to determine if the participants see the relevance and impact (whether positive or negative) of the church not engaging and evangelizing the community. 7) How does one engage in evangelism? This question is designed to reveal the participants' knowledge about strategies or models of evangelism. This question will also reveal the participants level of understanding on what evangelism is and what it entails. 8) What are some examples of evangelism in the community? This question is designed to see if participants are familiar with various methods or expressions of evangelism in the community. This question also reveals if the participants believe evangelism is taking place in the community. 9) Have your experienced evangelism in practice? If so, what did the evangelism look like? This question is designed to see if the participants can identify evangelism in action.

Secondly, a pre and post Adult Hope Scale was administered to the project participants. The Hope Scale was used to identify the hope level in project participants by identifying the levels of the two qualities that comprise hope: 1) Agency or willpower,

which is defined as "the energy to move toward one's goal" and 2) Pathways or way power, "the perceived ability to generate routes to get somewhere."[7] The Hope Scale is further described as:

> A 12-item measure of a respondent's level of hope. The scale is divided into two subscales, agency and pathways. Of the 12 items, 4 make up the Agency subscale and 4 make up the Pathways subscale. The remaining 4 items are fillers. Each item is answered using and 8-point Likert-type scale ranging from Definitely False to Definitely True. Researchers can either examine results at the subscale level or combine the two subscales to create a total hope score. The individual subscale score for agency or pathways ranges from four to thirty-two (4-32). Higher scores reflect higher levels of agency and pathway. The combine score for agency and pathway can range from four to sixty-four (4-64). Scores of 40-48 are hopeful, 48-56 are moderately hopeful, and 56 or higher or high hope.[8]

The Adult Hope Scale utilizes the following statements to determine hope levels (agency and pathway): 1. I can think of many ways to get out of a jam. 2. I energetically pursue my goals. 3. I feel tired most of the time. 4. There are lots of ways around any problem. 5. I am easily downed in an argument. 6. I can think of many ways to get the things in life that are important to me. 7. I worry about my health. 8. Even when others get discouraged, I know I can find a way to solve the problem. 9. My past experiences have prepared me well for my future. 10. I have been successful in life. 12. I meet the goals that I set for myself.

In the Interdisciplinary Chapter, the Hope Theory was examined to reveal that hope is not only a spiritual virtue, but also is a cognitive science that can be measured, raised, and lower. Viewed from this perspective, evangelism is not only a tool to help

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[7] C. R. Snyder, "Conceptualizing, Measuring, and Nurturing Hope," *Journal of Counseling and Development* 73, no. 3 (January 1995), ProQuest One Academic, 355, https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6676.1995.tb01764.x.

[8] Fetzer Institute, "Adult Hope Scale," Fetzer Institute, https://fetzer.org/sites/default/files/images/stories/pdf/selfmeasures/PURPOSE_MEANING-AdultHopeScale.pdf.

individuals, but also a tool of hope. The hope of and in evangelism is that it should engage individuals and communities in empowering ways that transform lives.

This method of data collection was chosen for the project, because once hope levels are determined by identifying agency and pathways, the information will be used to develop evangelism strategies to raise hope in low hope individuals. A life of hope is goal-oriented and is the ability to set, believe, and achieve goals. Hope and the task of "raising" and "maintaining" hope is relevant to any work direct toward facilitating change/transformation, because "higher hope constantly is related to better outcomes in academics, athletic, physical health, psychological adjustment, and psychotherapy."[9]

Thirdly, video presentations were utilized as a data collection method. Specific videos were chosen as visual representations to assist in reiterating and reinforcing major themes reoccurring throughout the project such as an expanded definition or understanding of evangelism, the role of the church in the world and community, and strategies for church and community engagement. The following YouTube videos were selected 1) "Evangelism in the 21st Century."[10] 2) "The Role of Church in Community."[11] 3) "Church by Default."[12]

Fourthly, a four-week book study was used for data collection using the book entitled, *Walking with Nehemiah: Your Community is Your Congregation*, written by

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[9] C. R. Snyder, *Hope Theory: Rainbows in the Mind, Psychological Inquiry* 13, no. 4 (2002): 249, http://www.jstor.org/stable/1448867.

[10] Tim Keller, "Evangelism in the 21st Century," Evangelical Alliance, September 8, 2011, video, 10:57, https://youtu.be/DHQBolo31Ns.

[11] Bill Crooks, "The Role of Church in Community," August 12, 2016, video, 10:57, https://youtu.be/eOXsgBZkPeM.

[12] M. Keith McDaniel, "Church by Default, We Need to Talk," May 2, 2021, video, 12:10, https://youtu.be/FayE9s99cR4.

Rev. Joseph Daniels, Sr. This book was chosen as a relevant form a data collection, because 1) It accurately captures the project's goal of community engagement and empowerment by creating and implementing a holistic evangelism plan relevant to the current context. 2) Using the life and ministry of Nehemiah, it provides a biblically based and nine practical action items steps (chapters) easily duplicable in any ministry setting. 3) It reinforces the fact that the church has a role and responsibility outside the four walls of the church; the community should be a focus of the church's evangelistic effort. The nine chapters and steps to effective evangelism strategies/community engagement detailed in the book are: Chapter One (*Feel Your Heart Break*), Chapter Two (*Pray for Next Steps*), Chapter Three (*Give it Your All*), Chapter Four (*Take the Risk*), Chapter Five (*Inspect Your Mission Field*), Chapter Six (*Gain Commitment*), Chapter Seven (*Get Work*), Chapter Eight (*Expect Opposition*), and Chapter Nine (*Build Momentum*).

Lastly, the fifth method of data collected utilized for the project was journal writing. As noted by John W. Creswell, journal writing

> Enables a researcher to obtain the language and words of participants [in a confidential setting conducive for transparency and honest in thought/feelings]; journals can be accessed at a time convenient to researcher-an unobtrusive source of information; it represents data which are thoughtful in that participants have given attention to compiling them; and as written evidence, it saves a researcher the time and expense of transcribing.[13]

This method of data collection was chosen to capture the participant's honest thoughts on subject matter relevant to the project but also to provide space for further thoughts and ideas to be shared. The following statements and questions were used as journaling prompts:

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[13] John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Method Approaches,* 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publishing, Inc., 2009), 180.

1. Journal about your specific experiences with evangelism and whether the church is obligated to evangelize the community.

2. Journal about what you perceive are the pressing needs of the community.

3. Journal about the role of the church in the community.

4. Journal about the evangelism skills and strategies present in the Book of Nehemiah (specifically chapters One -Ten).

5. Journal about your suggested plans and strategies for evangelizing the community.

It is important to note that only five journals were collected from the eleven project participants. Six participants failed to turn in their journals, citing work obligations, time restraints, and other issues. Although there was a lack of participation, essential themes, and insights relevant to the research project were gleaned from the collected journals, discussed further in the Summary of Learning section.

Implementation

The project entitled, "Transformational Hope: The Prophetic Ministry of Jesus as a Blueprint for Community Development," was implemented over a five-week time frame beginning on September 13, 2021, and it concluded on October 13, 2021. Due to Covid-19 protocols, a Zoom format was the primary mode of meeting except for two instances. The first meeting on September 13, 2021, was in person to distribute project materials to participants, to go over details of the project, and to administer the pre-questionnaire and pre-Adult Scale Survey. The final session on October 13, 2021, took place in-person to recap the research study, to discuss the project's next steps, administer

post-questionnaires and Adult Hope Scale Surveys, collect journals, and to have a fellowship time with a catered meal to thank participants for their participation. Strict Covid-19 guidelines were enforced for both in-person gatherings. Temperatures were checked upon entry, face masks were required, and participants were socially distanced throughout the meeting space (church fellowship hall).

Session One: September 13, 2021 - Outline

1. Opening prayer
2. Welcome
3. Introduction of project and project details
4. Administering of pre-questionnaire and pre-Adult Hope Scale Survey.
5. Time for answering question and addressing potential concerns.
6. Closing prayer

The first session was initially scheduled for September 12, 2021, for convenience immediately following morning worship service. Several participants did not attend worship service, and the first session was rescheduled for the following Monday, September 13, 2021, at 7:00 p.m. The session began with a prayer by the project director. After prayer, the participants were welcomed to the project and thanked for their participation. Participants received a welcome bag, which included a copy of *Walking with Nehemiah: Your Community is Your Congregation,* a pen, a name tag identifying them by their participant number instead of their names, a purple journal, and an outline and timeline of the research project.

Following the distribution of the project materials, I shared both the problem, the lack of knowledge and training to engage evangelism, and the project hypothesis: if the participants are educated about the spiritual principle of evangelism, then they will be equipped in the ministry context to create a plan of evangelism to implement within the

surrounding community. I also discussed the following goals and anticipated outcomes of the research: an increased knowledge about evangelism; the participants will understand evangelism as a spiritual component of the church; participants' increased attendance and participation in faith/spiritual development opportunities; participants will display a willingness to develop and plan evangelism strategies; and an increased desire and willingness to engage in evangelism.

The pre-questionnaire and Adult Hope were explained and administered, and the participants were allocated thirty minutes to complete their survey and questionnaire. The questionnaires and surveys were collected after completion. I reviewed the following project outline and timeline.

Week One - Session One (September 13)

- Fifteen minutes introduction and project details
- Thirty minutes to take a pre-test questionnaire and survey
- Fifteen minutes to address any questions, comments, or concerns

Week One - Session Two (September 15)

- Twenty - minute video presentation
- Sixty - minute lesson study and lesson application on *Walking with Nehemiah: Your Community is Your Congregation* Chapter One (Feel Your Heart Break) and Chapter Two (Pray for Next Steps).
- Fifteen – minute session summary and prompts for journaling.
- Participants will be asked to journal about their specific experiences with evangelism and whether the church is obligated to evangelize the community.

Week Two - Session Three (September 22)

- Twenty - minute video presentation
- Sixty - minute lesson study and lesson application on *Walking with Nehemiah: Your Community is Your Congregation* Chapter Three (Give it Your All) and Chapter Four (Take the Risk).
- Fifteen – minute session summary and prompts for journaling.
- Participants will be asked to journal about what they perceive are the pressing needs of the community.

Week Three - Session Four (September 29)

- Twenty - minute video presentation
- Forty-Five - minute lesson study and lesson application on *Walking with Nehemiah: Your Community is Your Congregation* Chapter Five (Inspect Your Mission Field) and Chapter Two (Gain Commitment).
- Fifteen – minute session summary and prompts for journaling.
- Participants will be asked to journal about the role of the church in the community.

Week Four - Session Five (October 6)

- Ninety - minute lesson study and lesson application on *Walking with Nehemiah: Your Community is Your Congregation* Chapter Seven (Get to Work), Chapter Eight (Expect Opposition), and Chapter Nine (Build Momentum).
- Fifteen – minute session summary and prompts for journaling.
- Participants will be asked to journal about evangelism skills present in the book of Nehemiah.

Week Five - Session Six (October 13)

- Thirty – minute project summary and overview.
- Ten – minute journal collection.
- Twenty – minute to administer post survey and questionnaire.
- Thirty – minute discussion on the project's next steps.
- Fifteen – minute session summary and prompts for journaling.
- Participants will be asked to journal about plans and strategies for evangelizing the community.
- Closing Prayer
- Closing Meal/Fellowship

A brief period of questions or comments followed the project overview and the discussion of the timeline. The participants were instructed to read chapters one and two of *Walking with Nehemiah* in preparation for the next session. Zoom log-in information was given to the participants, and the meeting was closed in prayer and participants were dismissed.

Session Two - Outline

1. Prayer

2. Video Presentation entitled Tim Keller on Evangelism in the Twenty-First Century (10:57).
3. Lesson Study on the book *Walking with Nehemiah: Your Community is Your Congregation*, Chapter One (Feel Your Heart Break) and Chapter Two (Pray for Next Steps).
4. Prompts for journaling and journal writing.
5. Closing prayer.

Session two consisted of watching and reviewing a video, discussing chapters one (Feel Your Heart Break) and two (Pray for Next Steps) of *Walking with Nehemiah,* and journaling. Participants were shown "Evangelism in the 21st Century (10:57)," by Tim Keller. The participant group discussed highlights of the video, key themes, and how the video related and could be applied to the research project and context. Understanding evangelism as both word and deed ministry and the difficulty of merging these two aspects of evangelism (word and deed/proclamation and demonstration) were topics that emerged during the discussion. One of the identified goals of the project was to expand the traditional view of evangelism as "proclamation only" concerned with individual salvation to include community engagement and community and social transformation.

Next, I led a study lesson on the first two chapters of *Walking with Nehemiah,* Chapter One (Feel Your Heart Break) and Chapter Two (Pray for Next Steps). The class discussed how the book study lessons could be applied to the research project. Participants were very engaged in the discussion on chapter one, "Feel Your Heart Break." Significant time was spent identifying what broke the group's collective heart in the community. Two "heartbreaks" that emerged were the lack of resources for single mothers and the lack of recreational and empowerment opportunities for the children and youth. A correlation was made between heartbreak and purpose. When you identify,

"what breaks your heart," you discover purpose or what God is calling you to confront and fix in your community.

From chapter two (Pray for Next Steps), prayer and fasting were identified as critical spiritual disciplines for effective evangelism and engagement. Upon hearing the news concerning the condition of Jerusalem, Nehemiah "wept, mourned for many days, and fasted and prayed before God" (Neh. 1:4, NRSV). Before moving forward with plans to rebuild and revitalize Jerusalem, Nehemiah prioritized prayer and fasting. As Nehemiah prayed and fasted for the next steps for his community, the church must pray and fast for clarity and direction from God before taking the next steps in engaging the community. Prayer and fasting clarify the "who, what, and how" of what God is calling the church to do in its context. God did not call the church to address or fix every problem in the community. However, God did uniquely gift and strategically position the church to address some problems in the community.

Session two concluded with the project director giving the participants journaling instructions. Participants were asked to journal about their specific experiences with evangelism and to discuss whether they believed the church was obligated to evangelize the community. The participants were also encouraged to freely write about any additional thoughts from the session. The participants were reminded to read the next two chapters of the book and study in preparation for the next session. Then class was dismissed with prayer.

Session Three - Outline

1. Prayer
2. Video Presentation entitled "The Role of the Church in the Community" (11:46).

3. Lesson Study on the book *Walking with Nehemiah: Your Community is Your Congregation,* Chapter Three (Give it Your All) and Chapter Four (Take the Risk).
4. Prompts for journaling and journal writing.
5. Closing prayer.

Session three began with prayer and a review of session two. Next, the participants were shown a 10:57 video entitled "The Role of Church in Community," by Bill Crooks. The video introduced the research group to the concept known as the Church and Community Mobilization Process (CCMP), a community engagement and community transformation strategy, which is an effective evangelism tool relevant to the overall goal of the research project. Francis Njoroge explains the objective of CCMP "is to empower people to transform their situation using their own God-given resources in a sustainable and holistic way."[14] Njoroge further explains the five stages of CCMP as:

1. Church awakening involves motivating the church to understand its role and relationship with the immediate community, starting with the Bible study in small groups. This understanding stirs the church to begin engaging its immediate community, stirring the community to take action to deal with its poverty, and influencing the life of the community, thus truly becoming 'salt and light' in the community.
2. Church and community description get the church and community to 'read" into their reality and desire to transform it. Through self-discovery the church and community explore the entire scope of their lives – physical, spiritual, economic, social – and begin to determine strategies to transform it.
3. Information-gathering provides the church and community with detailed information about the major aspects of their life. Information is power – the information that the church and community gather exposes both issues that they face and opportunities open to them to address those issues.
4. Information analysis 'opens the eyes' of the church and community to gain a true and full picture of the situation at a deep level. This gets them sufficiently agitated to 'take action now,' from and informed position.
5. Decision gets the church and community to reach decisions that completely turn their situation around – envisioning a better future, determining the best

[14] Francis W. Njoroge, *Church and Community Mobilisation Process: Facilitator's Manual*, Tearfund, https://learn.tearfund.org/-/media/learn/resources/tools-and-guides/2019-tearfund-ccmp-facilitators-manual-en.pdf, 1.

> options for change, designing the most appropriate actions, and actually taking definite actions to go forward.[15]

According to Bill Crooks, John 10:10, "I came that they may have life and have it to the full," is central to CCMP's purpose to help people live "full" lives (NIV).[16] "Living life to the full" is characterized as four things: "emotional well-being, physical well-being, social well-being, and spiritual well-being."[17] CCMP aligns with the research project's goals because it advocates empowering marginalized individuals and communities and models a holistic approach to ministry.

I reiterated how CCMP affirms and supports the role of the church in the community. The participants identified the parallels between the CCMP and the work of Nehemiah described in the *Walking with Nehemiah: Your Community is Your Congregation.* Participants also revealed how they felt God was calling Kingdom Movement to replicate many of the CCMP strategies and concepts in the local community.

Next, chapters three (Give it Your All) and four (Take the Risk) of the book *Walking with Nehemiah* were discussed. Commitment or church "buy-in" was the central theme identified in chapter three. After asking participants to define and describe their understanding of commitment, the term commitment was defined as "a promise or firm commitment to do something."[18] It was further explained how nothing works or is successful without commitment. Community engagement and community transformation

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[15] Njoroge, *Church and Community Mobilisation Process*, 5-8.

[16] Crooks, "The Role of Church in Community," 10:57, https://youtu.be/eOXsgBZkPeM.

[17] Crooks, "The Role of Church in Community," 10:57, https://youtu.be/eOXsgBZkPeM.

[18] Merriam-Webster Dictionary Online, s.v. "Commitment," Merriam-Webster, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/commitment.

require complete buy-in and full commitment from the church and its members for it to be efficacious. Dr. Joseph Daniels states, "You cannot be fully engaged without giving it your all. You cannot help people rebuild lives or communities with a lukewarm or sloppy effort. At some point, God's call for you to deal with your heartbreak and engage yourself in transformative work is going to require you to be passionately all in."[19] Commitment is essential to the work of evangelism and community engagement. It enables sacrifice from the church to create the necessary buy-in from the community.

Chapter Four of *Walking with Nehemiah* highlighted the risks associated with transformational ministry. Positively impacting the community and creating change is risky busy. Risk was defined as a "situation involving exposure to danger or the possibility of loss or injury."[20] Betterment and change require taking potentially spiritually, emotionally, and sometimes physically dangerous chances. Just like Nehemiah, the church is called to be risk-takers. Nehemiah put his life on the line by appearing sad before King Artaxerxes. For Nehemiah, the risk was worth the reward. He gained favor and resources with the king to go back and rebuild the broken and despaired Jerusalem community. For many marginalized people in broken communities, engaging the community is a life-or-death situation. The church must model Nehemiah's risk-taking posture and faith over fear mentality to transform the community. The work of God is often risky but always rewarding.

Session three concluded with giving the participants journaling instructions to journal about what they perceived were the pressing needs in the Coffeeville Community.

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[19] Daniels, *Walking with Nehemiah*, 45.

[20] Merriam-Webster Dictionary Online, s.v. "Risk (noun)," Merriam-Webster, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/risk.

I previewed the next session, asked participants to read chapters five and six in preparation for session four, and ended the session with prayer.

Session Four - Outline

1. Prayer
2. Video Presentation "Christian by Default" by Rev. Dr. Keith McDaniel (12:10).
3. Lesson Study on the book *Walking with Nehemiah: Your Community is Your Congregation* Chapter Five (Inspect Your Mission Field) and Chapter Six (Gain Commitment).
4. Prompts for journaling and journal writing.
5. Closing prayer.

Session four began with prayer and a brief review on session three. The research group was shown a 12:10 video entitled "Christian by Default" by Rev. Dr. Keith McDaniel. In the video, Dr. McDaniel challenges the church to self-examine and to reevaluate its role in a rapidly changing society. Using an analogy of dead fish washed up on a beach, he skillfully articulates possible reasoning behind the community/society's disinterest with the church and the church's disengagement with the community. For Dr. McDaniel, this mutual disengagement and disinterest is problematic because of the diminished role the church plays in the community (as opposed to the major role it once played). Dr. McDaniel suggests that if one fish washes up on the shore, it is natural to blame the fish for its failure. On the other hand, if thousands of fish wash up on the shore, reasonable persons would not blame the fish but ask what is wrong with the water or the fish's environment.[21]

Rather than asking why Millennials or Generation Zs are leaving the church, the church needs to ask herself what part she plays in people not wanting to be in the church

[21] McDaniel, "Christian by Default," 12:10, https://youtu.be/FayE9s99cR4.

anymore. Dr. McDaniel suggests the church needs to revisit what he labels "default Christianity." Default Christianity is a form of religion inherited from previous generations characterized as being misogynistic, homophobic, racist, chauvinistic, and uninviting to the least, the lost, and the last. In response to the video, I asked the participants to reconsider what it means to love your neighbor in the context of creating and implementing evangelism strategies within the local community.

After watching and analyzing the video, chapter five "Inspect Your Mission Field" and chapter six "Gain Commitment" were reviewed. The local community can be viewed as both a congregation and a mission field. A successful evangelism strategy begins with what Joe Daniels refers to as "talking before walking." Talking before walking is like "exegeting" a text in scripture. To better understand and assess the needs of the ministry context, a thorough inspection needs to take place. Spending time in the community is necessary to gain demographic information (who, what, when, why, where, and how) instrumental to effective strategizing. Identifying and understanding community demographics uncover "the sad realities of the community but also reveal the hidden possibilities."[22] Proper and prior inspection removes the guess work from creating and implementing effective strategies for meeting the needs in the community.

Another essential aspect of inspecting the mission field is fostering relationship building between the church and the community through conducting relational interviews and house meetings. Relational interviews are "one on one" meetings designed to gain information and build rapport with community members. These interactions build inroads from the church into the community, break down walls and barriers to collaborative

[22] Daniels, *Walking with Nehemiah*, 53.

ministry, and build trust between involved parties. House meetings build on the information and momentum gained from relational interviews. These meetings are another opportunity to build trust and gain buy-in. The purpose of house meetings is to bring people together, identify pressing problems in the community, and strategize on how to address these issues. Critical to the success of relational interviews and house meeting is identifying and involving "community mayors." Community mayors are "people of influence that even the elected officials unofficially report to. These are people who know the community better than anybody."[23] Ranging from elected officials to drug dealers and gang members, community mayors are instrumental in making or breaking any community project.

Discussion on chapter six centered around the relationship between the church's reputation and its ability to gain commitment from the community. Joe Daniels warns that identifying problems and issues in the community does not necessarily ensure that they will be properly addressed or that people in the community will participate in the effort." He described the following steps to gain commitment:[24]

1. Know their self-interest.
2. Wait to speak until the time is right.
3. Get folks in the community to see you as one of them.
4. Share the simple truth of the matter.
5. Extend an invitation.
6. Share your story of God at work in this situation.

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[23] Daniels, *Walking with Nehemiah*, 57.

[24] Daniels, *Walking with Nehemiah*, 66-71.

Community hesitancy or unwillingness to commit to collaborating with the church centers on trust. Jesus reveals the connection between commitment, perception, and trust in Matthew 16:13-14 when asking the disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" The project manager asked the participants to discuss the community's perception of KMCC. Perception is crucial to gaining commitment and to encouraging participation. People are unwilling to commit to whom they do not trust or whom they feel is not credible. When the church is deemed truthful, trustworthy, and authentic, it becomes or is seen as a part of the community. People in the community are more prone to commit and to collaborate with the church because engagement is perceived as doing ministry with the community instead doing ministry for the community.

Session four concluded with journal writing. The participants were asked to journal about the role of the church in the community. I previewed session five and reminded the participants to read the last three chapters of *Walking with Nehemiah*. The session ended with prayer.

Session Five - Outline

1. Prayer
2. Lesson Study on the book *Walking with Nehemiah: Your Community is Your Congregation* Chapter Seven (Get to Work), Chapter Eight (Expect Opposition), Chapter Nine (Build Momentum).
3. Group discussion on how the lesson can be applied to the project.
4. Prompts for journaling and journal writing.
5. Closing prayer.

Session five concluded the book study portion of the research project with a review of chapters seven (Get to Work), eight (Expect Opposition), and nine (Build Momentum). Chapter seven explained that a key to getting people to work is "creating a bridge from

excitement and commitment to action."[25] Moving from excitement and commitment to action requires "strong organization and outlining people's assignments and what is expected of them."[26] Strong organization involves identifying and placing people/workers into correct categories. The author suggests that most people can be categorized as "visionaries, planners, or doers, and that you rarely find all three in the same person."[27] These categories are consistent with Habakkuk 2:2 which states, "Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so that a runner may read it" (NRSV). Habakkuk identifies three phases to visioning: a writing phase, a reading and making it plain phase, and a running phase. These phases also reveal the three types of people necessary for vision: visionaries, strategists/planners, and doers/runners, which all are needed to work together doing their part for effective community engagement.

Another important aspect of getting people excited about the community and to get to work in the community is creating a vision and mission for the community. Vision comes from God. It is a picture of "Godly" possibility or a "fresh picture of what can be especially in communities characterized by hopelessness despair and dismay."[28] Vision also describes where someone or something is going or becoming; what God is calling the community to do and be. A good vision cannot be achieved with a weak strategy. A strategy is the mission or strategic planning that describes how the vision is going to be accomplished. If the vision is the goal, the mission is the plan.

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[25] Daniels, *Walking with Nehemiah*, 77.

[26] Daniels, *Walking with Nehemiah*, 77.

[27] Daniels, *Walking with Nehemiah*, 79.

[28] Daniels, *Walking with Nehemiah*, 78.

The research group was given time to create a vision and mission statement for the research project. After a brief discussion, the research group described the church's vision is to become an unstoppable movement of hope and holistic transformation in the community by helping and healing like Jesus. The developed mission statement was to "rebuild the community by repairing the individuals in the community."

Chapter eight warned about the impending opposition that comes with doing anything meaningful and positive for God. According to Daniels, "Whenever a group of people commits itself to the common good – fully engaged in bringing hope to the vulnerable and defenseless – you can expect that some people will ridicule, and others will not participate."[29] While repairing the walls and rebuilding the gates in Jerusalem, Nehemiah experienced opposition from Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem (Nehemiah 2:1 – 6:19). These three men were enemies of the Jews and represented political, religious, and "dismissive opposition, which minimizes or trivializes a project in an attempt to cause people who were committed to be discouraged or less enthusiastic about the project."[30]

In addition to political and dismissive opposition, chapter eight identifies four other types of opposition: mental, perceived, apathy, and real.[31] Opposition is inevitable, but it is not always an indication of wrong. Opposition is often an indication that something is right. Throughout scripture from Moses to Jesus, opposition occurred whenever or wherever change and transformation was taking place.

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[29] Daniels, *Walking with Nehemiah*, 89.

[30] Daniels, *Walking with Nehemiah*, 95.

[31] Daniels, *Walking with Nehemiah*, 92-98.

Although opposition is unavoidable, it must be properly leveraged because the handling of opposition determines success or failure. When handled appropriately, opposition becomes opportunity for God to perform miracles. The following ways were discussed about how to handle opposition:[32]

1. Expect and anticipate opposition.
2. Do not be distracted or discouraged by opposition. Opposition is often a sign that you are doing the right thing or going in the right direction.
3. Use the opposition as opportunity.
4. Stay focused on what God has called you to do.
5. Do not allow opposition to stop the work.

Chapter nine discussed the importance of establishing, building, and maintaining momentum in rebuilding and restoring the community. "Big Mo" (momentum) was defined as the "strength or force that something has when it is moving; the strength or force that allows something to continue or to grow stronger or fast as times passes."[33] Momentum creates the energy and excitement necessary for starting and completing a project. Chapter nine lists the following steps as "distinct, important, and critical steps necessary for congregations and communities to keep momentum moving in the process of restoration:"[34]

1. Remember whose work you are doing.
2. Be enthusiastic.

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[32] Daniels, *Walking with Nehemiah*, 91.

[33] Merriam-Webster Dictionary Online, s.v. "Momentum (noun)," Merriam-Webster, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/risk.

[34] Daniels, *Walking with Nehemiah*, 103-112.

3. Create special teams.
4. Nip complaints in the bud.
5. Hold people accountable – including yourself.
6. Control the tempo and the message.
7. Persist until the work is done.

The session ended with the research group discussing possible ways to build momentum for the project in addition to the methods revealed in chapter nine. Participants were asked to journal about the evangelism skills or strategies present in the book of Nehemiah, and the session was closed with prayer.

Session Six - Outline

1. Prayer
2. Project summary and project overview.
3. Administering of post – questionnaire and post – Adult Hope Scale.
4. Journal collection.
5. Discussion of the project's next steps.
6. Closing prayer.

Session six concluded the research project. The research group met in the fellowship hall at KMCC at 7:00 p.m. The session started with prayer and an overall review of the research project. I reviewed the goals and the hypothesis of the project. Participants were given an opportunity to discuss what they learned from the study. Participants revealed that: 1) their understanding of evangelism was expanded to include proclamation, demonstration, and engagement with the community, 2) that the church has a pivotal role to play in revitalizing and rebuilding the community, and 3) they expressed excitement surrounding creating and implementing a plan of evangelism for the community.

Next, I administered the post-questionnaire and the post-Adult Hope Scale survey which was the same as the pre-questionnaire/surveys. After completing the survey and questionnaire, I led an initial discussion on creating and implementing an evangelism plan in the community and the next steps for the project. The research group identified the following groups to target single mothers and fathers, children and youth, and teachers and educators in the local school system. While follow-up discussions are necessary, the group established that any evangelism plan would include educating, empowering, and equipping the targeted groups to succeed. The research group designated December to finalize an evangelism plan to implement in the new year (2022). I expressed the desire to eventually establish a 501(c)3 to create other economic, social, educational, and other resources for the community.

Expressions of gratitude was extended to the participants for their participation. The group fellowshipped with a catered meal as a token of appreciation. Questionnaires, surveys, and journals were collected. I prayed for discernment for the next steps, the success of the project, and for the participants' well-being. After prayer, the participants were dismissed, and the research project officially concluded.

Summary of Learnings

The following descriptive analysis represents the summary of learnings related to the research project and participants. Twelve persons were recruited to participate in the research; however, one withdrew from the project. The participants' demographics are as follows:

Gender:

- 54.5% Male
- 45.5 % Female

Education:

- 36.4 % High School Graduates
- 18.1% Some College
- 45.5% College Degree and/or Graduate Degree

Age:

- 36% Millennials
- 45% Generation X
- 18% Boomers

The survey questions were open-ended to provide participants with the opportunity to respond without limitations, restrictions, or coercion. The survey responses were thoroughly reviewed and categorized according to themes that organically emerged based on the analysis. All the questions did not fit neatly into one thematic grouping. Therefore, the questions were divided and analyzed into four separate groupings. Questions one, two, three, eight, and nine were grouped together, questions four and five were group together, and questions six and seven were grouped by themselves individually.

For survey questions one (How would you define evangelism?), two (What is an example of evangelism?), three (Do you believe in evangelism as a spiritual component? If so, why?), eight (What are some examples of evangelism in the community?) and nine (Have you ever experience evangelism in practice? If so, what did evangelism look like?), the following represent the major identified themes: 1) evangelism as

proclamation, 2) evangelism as demonstration, 3) evangelism as provision (accommodation), 4) evangelism as spiritual development/maturation, and 5) evangelism as community engagement and empowerment (collaboration).

Those who regard evangelism as proclamation (P) embrace the more traditional understanding of evangelism as proclamation or words that are spoken to convince others to accept and follow Jesus. Evangelism is viewed verbally as words (teaching, speaking, witnessing, preaching, and telling the Gospel, concerned with personal salvation). Those who regard evangelism as demonstration (D) expressed the importance of being of model of Christian virtues and living as an example and representative of Christ. These respondents viewed evangelism as being more than verbal proclamation. There responses suggested evangelism faithfully practiced involves word and deed, proclamation and demonstration. Effective evangelism is both spoken and lived. Those who regard evangelism as accommodation (A) expressed the importance of providing services or times to satisfy or meet the basic needs of individuals and the community. Those who view evangelism as spiritual maturation (M) or personal spiritual growth activities or disciplines place a greater emphasis on the inner spiritual life of the believer. Several the respondents connected evangelism with activities that would cultivate and nurture spiritual maturation such as attending worship services and revivals, Bible studies, and other membership training classes. Those who regard evangelism as community collaboration (C) expressed and outward orientation that extended beyond the walls of the church. The respondents communicated the importance of embracing efforts directed towards engaging and empowering the community. These respondents acknowledged the vital role the local church plays in the community by delivering goods and services and

the importance of collaborating with other entities to bring resources and relief to distressed areas.

Appendix D is a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet that reflects participant responses to each question in the pre- and post-questionnaire. Each comment was assigned a letter that corresponded with each theme to indicate how it was categorized. Due to the question being open-ended, a single response could include elements that aligned with different themes, therefore, some of the responses have multiple letters beside them.

Due to their similarity, the responses to question four (What is the character of a person willing to engage in evangelism?) and question five (Having identified the character of a person who evangelizes, do you possess any of these characteristics? If so, what are they?) were thematically grouped together. Both questions were designed with a yes or no component with an open-ended follow-up question. The following represent the emergent characteristics or themes the respondents associated with evangelism: Relationship with God (R), Knowledge of Scripture (K), Compassion (C), Non-judgmental (NJ), Inclination/Willingness to Evangelize (I), Empathy (E), and Authenticity/Truthfulness (A).

The responses to question six (What are the consequences of not evangelizing the community?) did not fit into the previously identified themes. The responses were themed as follows: Did not Answer (DNA), Decreased Salvations (S), Lack of Spiritual Growth (G), Moral Decline (MD), Community Decay and Decline (CM), No/Strained Relationship Between Church and Community (R), Missed Opportunities to Engage and Empower the Community.

The responses to question seven (How does one engage in evangelism) also did not fit into the previously identified themes. The following themes represent the response: Gaining Knowledge of Scripture (S), Proper Training (T), Engaging the Community (C), and Being an Example (E).

Statistical Analysis of Questionnaire

Responses to question one of the post-surveys suggest a more comprehensive understanding of evangelism that goes beyond verbal proclamation. While the post-survey revealed that participants believe proclamation is an important component to evangelism, 25% of the participants specifically mentioned the community as a focus of evangelism. None mentioned a community focus in the pre-survey. This indicates that the intervention succeeded in expanding the groups understanding of evangelism.

Responses to question two of the post-questionnaire indicate that 13% of the participants still regard proclamation as a vital method of evangelism. However, 65% indicated the importance of accommodating and meeting needs of individuals in the community (30%) and the importance of engaging the community (35%) through collaborative and cooperative ministry. Again, this evidence suggest that the intervention was effective in expanding the participants scope of activities related to evangelism. The comments also indicate movement from an inward orientation regarding evangelism to a much broader and outward orientation that embraces the larger community.

Both pre-and post-responses to question three suggest that participants were unclear about this question. The question was posed as yes or no with an open-ended follow-up component. While all participants responded yes in both the pre-and post-

questionnaires indicating some understanding of evangelism as a spiritual exercise, many of the follow-up responses were unclear or unintelligible. The responses lead me to debate the overall effectiveness of the question. I acknowledge the question could have been posed differently to generate better responses. A better question would have been Do you believe the church has a spiritual obligation to evangelize? If so, why?

The question aimed to access the participants' understanding of whether evangelism is a biblically mandated mission and ministry of the church. Statistics support an alarming trend that churches and Christians no longer engage in evangelism. In *How to Revive Evangelism*, Craig Springer notes, "Overwhelming, we're [Christians] simply not sharing faith anymore. In the US especially, the instinct to evangelize is eroding."[35] To support the claims of declining attitudes toward evangelism, the Barna Group reported that "forty-seven percent of Millennial Christians believe that sharing their faith with others is wrong"[36] Not only do some Christians feel evangelism is optional to their faith, but a majority feel like it is wrong.

Because of the alarming trends surrounding evangelism, I wanted the intervention to establish that evangelism is not optional nor an alternative ministry for the church or believers. Additionally, I wanted to determine if a negative attitude toward evangelism characterizes the present ministry context. The responses to question three did not prove the intervention was successful or unsuccessful. However, subsequent conversations concerning the church and the believer's obligation to evangelize did. When I explained

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[35] Craig Springer, *How to Revive Evangelism: Seven Vital Shifts in How We Share Our Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Reflective, 2021), 2.

[36] Barna Group, "Reviving Evangelism: Current Realities that Demand a New Vision for Sharing Faith," Barna, https://www.edusc.org/uploads/images/reviving -evangelism_995.pdf.

the intent of question three, all participants agreed that evangelism is not optional for believers. The participants also affirmed how the intervention helped clarify their understanding of evangelism as a biblically mandated ministry/function of the church.

The pre- and post-responses to question four spoke to the research project's purpose. The research project's goal was to solve the problem of the lack of knowledge and training to engage in evangelism. The solution addressed the problem on two levels. First, it educated participants who expressed a willingness to evangelize but lacked the knowledge and skill. Secondly, it encouraged and motivated participants who displayed no inclination to evangelize to engage in evangelism.

The top three traits the participants associated with evangelism in the pre-questionnaire responses were compassion (22%), a relationship with God (17%), and being inclined to evangelize (17%). The post-questionnaire reflected an increase in having a relationship (29%) and being inclined to evangelize (24%). Both increased responses prove the success of the project intervention. Influential to engaging evangelistic ministry is not only knowing how but having a desire (willingness) to do so. The participants' post-responses also reveal a connection between maintaining a relationship with God and a desire to evangelize. As people mature in God, there is an increased willingness to proclaim and demonstrate the gospel through evangelism.

Like question four, question five gauged the participant's knowledge of the evangelism traits they possessed. The question was two parts: a yes or no question and a follow-up question to explain. When asked if they possessed any of the characteristics previously identified in question four, all pre-and post-responses were yes (eleven). The top characteristics associated with evangelism in the pre-responses were having a

relationship with God (28%) and an inclination to evangelize (22%). Post-responses reflected increases in having a relationship with God to 29%, and an inclination to evangelize increased to 24%, revealing growth attributable to the intervention. The study suggests that the participants are knowledgeable and aware of their evangelization skills and traits. The increased willingness to evangelize also suggests that increased knowledge about evangelism is critical in equipping people with the motivation to move from knowledge and reflection to praxis. When people know more about a particular topic, like evangelism, the post-responses imply they do better.

Question six was designed to capture the participants' thoughts on the relationship between the church and the community. The question was also designed to gather the church's perceived role(s) in the community and the consequences of the church being absent or inactive in the community. Additionally, I wanted the participants to begin to associate evangelism, as a community engagement and community involvement strategy, with one of the church's fundamental roles in the community.

Both pre-and post-responses established the participants' belief that the church plays a vital role in the life and well-being of the community. The responses also reveal that the failure of the church to evangelize the community has substantial consequences. The pre-responses indicated the top four consequences of not evangelizing the community as:

1. Inadequate or strained relationships with the community (27%).
2. Decreased salvations or fewer people accepting Christ (20%).
3. Community decay and decline (13%)
4. Lack of spiritual growth tied (13%).

In the post-responses to the consequences of the church not evangelizing the community, inadequate or strained relationships with the community remained the same at 27%. However, community decay and decline increased from 13% to 27%. Also, one participant did not respond to the question in the pre-responses but answered it in the post-responses. I assume the participant gained knowledge and information during the intervention that informed a post-question response. These statistics support the success of the intervention in establishing the church as a catalyst for community development and revitalization. The community declines in the absence of the church and multidimensional holistic ministry. However, when the church engages the community, is involved in community life, and establishes healthy relationships, collaborative ministry is made possible to address the community's educational, socio-economic, and other needs. Like the one in the research project's context, rural communities benefit significantly from the church evangelizing but also suffer when the church does not.

Responses to question seven in the pre-questionnaire indicated that 36% of participants believed having an accurate and adequate knowledge of scripture is foundational for engaging in evangelism. While scripture remained relevant to engaging in evangelism in the post-responses (13%), 38% of the participants acknowledged engaging the community (up from 7% in pre-questionnaire), and 31% acknowledged participating in opportunities to evangelize as primary means of getting involved with evangelism (up from 29%). The participants' themed responses described engaging the community as being present and active, building relationships in and with the community, attending community functions, and participating in civic affairs. They believed evangelism consisted of creating community food pantries, building a

community playground, and purchasing supplies for single mothers. Comments implying that engaging in evangelism involves participating in evangelizing opportunities were more outreach-oriented. The pre- and post-response evidence suggests the intervention successfully taught the participants that evangelism is more than what happens in church. Evangelism should be other-oriented and community-centered. Not only should churches and believers engage the community, but they should also actively seek opportunities to participate in evangelism.

Question eight attempted to determine if evangelism was present in the ministry context, whether the participants recognized it, and what they believed were examples of it. The participants identified several aspects of evangelism active in the community. In the post-questionnaire, evangelism as a collaboration was the overwhelming example identified with 45%, which increased from 32%. The second highest example of evangelism identified in the post-responses was evangelism as accommodation at 23% (down from 32%). The participants' responses indicated an expanded understanding of evangelism, supporting a successful project intervention. The research participants grasped that evangelism is not limited to a verbal proclamation. It is proclamation, demonstration, accommodation, maturation, and collaboration.

Question nine asked the participants if they ever experienced evangelism in practice and, if so, to describe their experiences. In both the pre- and post-responses, one participant expressed that they never experienced evangelism in practice, whether performing it or receiving it. The person in the pre-questionnaire did not provide follow-up details, but the person in the post-questionnaire said they lacked the skills to

evangelize. Based on previous responses, this response was confusing. A follow-up discussion is needed to clarify what the participant meant.

Most participants indicated that they experienced evangelism both by performing and receiving it. Pre-responses revealed that the participants experienced evangelism the most through verbal proclamation (35%) and demonstration (35%). Most participants grew up in or around religious households where the Bible was read (proclamation). They attended church and spent time around people who spoke and modeled evangelism like parents and grandparents (demonstration).

Responses to question nine of the post-questionnaire still indicated proclamation as the most experienced form of evangelism (25%). However, the project intervention assisted the participants in recognizing that they experienced evangelism as accommodation (25%), which increased from 6%. These results reveal that the participants experience with evangelism were limited to evangelism as proclamation and demonstration prior to the intervention. Again, the intervention influenced the participants to view evangelism holistically and multidimensional. Understanding evangelism as word and deed ministry is accurate but incomplete. The full scope of evangelism expands it to include accommodation, maturation, and community collaboration. When the church engages all aspects of evangelism, change, transformation, and revitalization occurs individually and communally.

Analysis of Adult Hope Scale Survey

In addition to the pre-and post-questionnaire, the project director administered a pre-and post-Adult Hope Scale, derived from the Hope Theory, to measure the

participants' hope levels. The Hope Theory implies that hope is a cognitive science that is "understandable, measurable, and essential as a coping strategy."[37] The Hope Theory defines hope as "as a positive motivational state that is based on an interactively derived sense of successful (a) agency (goal-directed energy, and (b) pathways (planning to meet goals."[38] Agency is more commonly referred to as willpower, and pathways is referred to as waypower. According to this definition, hope is goal-oriented and involves the ability to set goals, develop strategies to achieve those goals, and maintain the positive mindset to keep pursuing goals amidst obstacles and opposition. Through this lens, hope can be understood as a psychological science that can be raised, lowered, or maintained in individuals.

I found that measuring and identifying the participants' hope levels were relevant to the research project in helping establish the relationship between the church, hope, evangelism, and transformational ministry. The church's role in the community is to be centers of hope and instruments of help through holistic ministry. Creating and implementing evangelism strategies in the community means developing ministries that address the "hope killers," which are the various disparities and injustice within communities. It also means incorporating goal-oriented ministry initiatives that raise individual and communal hope by moving people beyond the despair and hopelessness of what is and embracing the possibilities of what could be through goal setting and helping achieve those goals.

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[37] Snyder, "Conceptualizing," 355, https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6676.1995.tb01764.x.

[38] C. R. Snyder, "Hope Theory: Rainbows in the Mind," *Psychological Inquiry* 13, no. 4 (2002): 250, https://www.jstor.org/stable/1448867.

Adult Hope Scale Results

The Adult Hope Scale can be scored by measuring agency and pathways separately or agency and pathways can be scored together to produce a total hope score. I chose to score the two measures together for a total hope score. The scoring categories are as follows:[39]

- Low Hope (39 or lower)
- Hopeful (40-48)
- Moderately Hopeful (48-56)
- High Hope (56 or higher)

The pre-test Adult Hope Scale scores revealed a high level of hope among the participants. Eighty-two percent of the participants scored as hopeful, moderately hopeful, or highly hopeful in the pre-scores, while 18% (two out of eleven participants) scored as low hope (Appendix E). Although the post-responses indicated that the low hope increased to 27%, most of the participants remained hopeful at 72%. The participants' high hope levels are relevant to the project because research on hope shows "that people with high hope do better in life than those with low hope."[40] Hope is a "psychological strength" with three essential functions:

> First, hope can buffer the effects of adversity and stress and serves as an important coping resource for both children and adults. Next, hope predicts adaptive thoughts and behaviors. Put simply, hopeful people have better outcomes connected to the way they think and behave. Finally, and most important to all of us, hope can be learned. Intentional strategies or interventions can move the needle on hope.[41]

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[39] Casey Gwinn and Chan Hellman, *Hope Rising: How the Science of Hope Can Change Your Life* (New York, NY: Morgan James Publishing, 2019), 37-39.

[40] Gwinn and Hellman, *Hope Rising*, 16.

[41] Gwinn and Hellman, *Hope Rising*, 18.

High hope individuals not only handle difficulties and challenges better than low individuals, but people with high hope are also better skilled to model high hope behavior and increase hope in others. Additionally, participants who are high hope, can help develop ministry strategies that reflect and inspire hope in the community.

Concerning the low hope participants, there was no follow-up interview to identify why three participants scored low hope. However, each made comments throughout the intervention that gave an indication of why they scored low. For example, participant number one was separated from their spouse during the study and was uncertain about their relationship's future. C. R. Snyder in *Hope Theory: Rainbows of the Mind* identifies divorce and other traumatic events as factors that diminish hope.[42] Likewise, participant number ten experienced life disruptions during the intervention that possibly contributed to their low hope. Participant number two had ongoing work issues and family issues that could have negatively impacted their hope level.

Analysis of Journals

Five of eleven journals were returned. The participants who returned journals were participant two, participant three, participant six, participant seven, and participant eight. Each journaling sessions began with the following writing prompts:

1) What are your specific experiences with evangelism and is the church obligated to evangelize the community?
2) What are the pressing needs of the community (project context)?
3) What is the role of the church in the community?

[42] Snyder, "Hope Theory," 263.

4) Discuss evangelism skills present in the book of Nehemiah.
5) What are some plans and strategies for evangelizing the community?

The journaling process was implemented to support the project thesis on educating participants on evangelism's spiritual principle and to supplement the intervention. The writing prompts were also designed to gauge the intervention's success. Despite limited participation and data, I attempted to gather relevant information by identifying and summarizing the emerging themes. In addition to the identified themes, I included some direct responses from the participants to support those themes.

Themes from Journal Entry One

When asked what their specific experiences with evangelism were, evangelism as verbal proclamation emerged as a common theme through teaching Bible study and children's ministry and attending worship services. As to whether the church is obligated to evangelize the community, all five participants said yes. The following represent a portion of direct participants' responses.

- "God calls us as the church to a life of evangelism. Every Christian is called to a life of service, and sometimes you don't have to leave your neighborhood."
- "Yes, we are the church, and we are obligated to evangelize and fulfill the Great Commission."
- "Yes, the church is called to evangelize and needs to take its rightful place in the community."

The direct responses support one of the stated goals of the project, which was to establish the community as a focal point of church ministry. The responses also indicate that the

participants understood the church's role is central to community life and well-being supporting the success of the project intervention.

Themes from Journal Entry Two

Journal entry two asked the participants to identify the pressing needs of the project context. The lack of resources (social, economic, recreational, educational, and jobs) was consistently identified as the most pressing needs of the community. Identifying communal needs are not only relevant to the church's purpose or what issues God is specifically calling the church to address, identifying community needs are also relevant to creating and implementing an effective evangelism plan. The following are samples of participants' direct responses:

- "The community suffers from poor education/lack of resources. There are no recreation activities for children and youth in the community."
- "In the town of Coffeeville, Mississippi, I have several concerns, especially for the youth. First of all, our youth have no recreation facility, park, or even a basketball court. I went to school board meetings, the police department, and town boards meetings, but unfortunately, no one wanted to provide something for the children to enjoy. This creates unacceptable behavior especially for children who have disabilities."
- "Something I wished would change is the economic situation. Coffeeville just lost its bank (on April Fool's Day). How the town still stand is a mystery. No banks and no job outlook, leaves Coffeeville just like coffee, dark, gloomy and uncertain."

The direct responses reveal the problems and the possibilities and benefits of implementing the research project in the community. One participant explicitly identifies the church's need and ability to fill the delivery of goods and service void by providing needed resources. Her comments also reflect the resource challenges many small rural towns face regarding other entities like the police force, school system, and civil leaders. Many of these entities have limited access to resources individually, supporting one of the projects aims and successful intervention: community and church collaboration.

Themes from Journal Entry Three

Based on the journal responses, the church is viewed as a central figure to community life, and its role is to be the spiritual and moral center of the community. As the community center, participants indicated that the church should lead the community in change, create growth opportunities, live lives of faith that point people to God, and love and care for others. The following responses represent direct quotes from the participants:

- "Churches should be visible and accessible within the community. A church is tasked to rebuild and restore the community."
- "The church plays an important role in community cohesion; bringing the community together."
- "The church can play a vital role is assisting the community by providing food banks, housing, and volunteering for local charities."
- "The church is called to support people who are going through difficulties, no matter their background."

The journal responses support the success of the project intervention by 1) establishing that the church plays a significant or is called to play a vital role in the community's life, and 2) by revealing the participants' expanded understanding of evangelism to include more than verbal proclamation. These responses imply the church is not restricted to what happens behind the sanctuary's four walls or limited to providing services to members only. The church is called to be visible, viable, and vocal in the local community, promoting wholeness, wellness, transformation, and revitalization.

Themes from Journal Entry Four

The research project relied on the book *Walking with Nehemiah: Your Community is Your Congregation* by Joseph Daniels Sr. as the primary intervention source. The book analyzed the life of Nehemiah and used his life and ministry as a blueprint to develop nine strategies or steps to engage the community effectively. Participants were asked to identify the evangelism elements present in the life of Nehemiah, because this knowledge was instrumental in assisting the church to create and implement an effective evangelism plan for the community. The following evangelism skills emerged from participants' responses:

- A solid relationship with God
- Community engagement
- Vision casting and implementation
- Passion for people and passion for rebuilding community
- Being obedient to God
- Collaboration with the community

- Compassion for less fortunate people

The journal entries mirrored the participant's responses to question four in the pre-and post-questionnaires. The journal entries showed participant growth in identifying skills and traits necessary for effective evangelism through community engagement.

Themes from Journal Entry Five

The research project can be categorized into three distinct phases. These phases include education and equipping the participants/church, devising an evangelism strategy, and actual implementation. The final entry's intent was for the research group to move into the project's second phase and formulate an evangelism strategy for the ministry context. The responses revealed whom the evangelism strategy should target and what the strategy should entail.

First, the participants identified the following target groups in the community: children and youth, single and unwed mothers, and teachers and educators. While the participants did not fully complete an evangelism plan, one participant referenced Matthew 25:34-40, suggesting that an evangelism model be created and employed to make people whole in Jesus (physically, emotionally, mentally, spiritually, relationally, and economically). Additionally, it was identified that any evangelism strategy would seek to provide services that 1) educate, 2) empower, and 3) equip. After a holistic evangelism strategy is complete, the research could guide the church in implementing the plan in the ministry context.

Overall, the research methodologies prove that the project intervention was successful. Despite the lack of journal participation, the information collected from the

other forms of data collection (questionnaire, survey, and videos) points to the participants' more significant understanding of what evangelism is and what role the church is called to play in the community.

Conclusion

This research project attempted to educate and equip leaders and laity to design an evangelism model that would revitalize the ministry context. As a form of community development, this evangelism model would be holistic in scope (address every area of human experience) and missional in practice (sending the church to engage the community). To create such a plan, it required education for the participants about evangelism as a spiritual principle, which included: 1) Establishing that evangelism is not optional for the church. All believers are called to fulfill the Great Commission; 2) Expand the practice of evangelism to include more than verbal proclamation aimed at individual salvation. Evangelism is multidimensional and includes proclamation, demonstration, accommodation, maturation, and collaboration; and 3) Acknowledging the church's vital role the in the community's life, which includes being centers of hope and institutions of help.

The hypothesis that guided this research was that if participants are educated about the spiritual principle of evangelism, then they will be equipped to help the ministry context to create a plan of evangelism to implement within the surrounding community. Based on the data collected from the pre-and post-questionnaires, the pre- and post-Adult Hope Scale survey, the journal entries, and discussion with the participants throughout the intervention, the project hypothesis was proven to be

successful. The success of the intervention was evidenced by the participant's increased knowledge about evangelism. Before the intervention, the participants primarily understood evangelism as proclamation not inclusive of community engagement. The participants also displayed an increased willingness to participate in the church's evangelistic activities supported by the participates involvement in year-end planning meetings for the upcoming year.

"Transformational Hope: The Prophetic Ministry of Jesus as a Blueprint for Community Development" is a replicable evangelistic model that uses a social gospel and liberation hermeneutic of church and community engagement, which in turn can motivate the church to identify and address communal needs. This ministry model sends forth a clarion call to the church to be a voice and advocate for hope: a "hope dealer" that seeks to counter the "hope-killers" in the community. The ministry model was designed to be prophetic and practical to confront and challenge the systems and structures that perpetuate hopelessness, decline and distress. Just as Jesus was anointed to bring and be the good news in scripture (hope), the Holy Spirit anointed the church to be witnesses to the good news of hope. When the church emulates and implements Jesus' model of prophetic teaching and practice demonstrated in scripture, the church will be a source of hope and a catalyst for community renewal.

The project was limited in scope in that it only addresses one of three identified phases. Those phases are educating and equipping, planning, and strategizing, and implementation. This project lays the foundation for the other two phases to be built upon by giving the participants the knowledge and skills necessary for effective strategizing. Other steps need to be taken such as forming community focus groups and building

relationship with other entities in the community to ensure collaboration and buy-in. This process also enables community assets and strengths to be identified, which allows the church to do ministry with the community instead of for the community.

In conclusion, evangelism is a multidimensional ministry that is a vital and mandatory function of the church. Through both proclamation and demonstration, evangelism helps spread the good news of the gospel to people and places in desperate need of hope. Reestablishing evangelism as a priority for the church is one of the ways the church remains relevant and effective in addressing the evangelism challenges and other crises confronting the church like the Covid-19 Pandemic. As a result of government restrictions, social distancing mandates, and restrictions on gatherings, Covid-19 forced us to rethink what it meant to be the church and reimagine how pandemic ministry should look. One benefit of the pandemic is that it caused the church to embrace technology and social media as a form of evangelism. Through Zoom and other digital platforms, the gospel continues to go forth, establishing evangelism as a powerful agent of change and transformation.

APPENDIX A

PRE-AND POST-RESEARCH PROJECT QUESTIONNAIRE

PRE-AND POST-RESEARCH PROJECT QUESTIONNAIRE

1. How would you define evangelism?
2. What is an example of evangelism?
3. Do you believe in evangelism as a spiritual component? If so, why?
4. What is the character of a person willing to engage in evangelism?
5. Having identified the character of a person who evangelizes, do you possess any of these characteristics? If so, what are they?
6. What are the consequences of a church not evangelizing the community?
7. How does one engage in evangelism?
8. What are some examples of evangelism in the community?
9. Have you ever experienced evangelism in practice? If so, what did the evangelism look like?

APPENDIX B

PRE-AND POST-ADULT HOPE SCALE SURVEY

Pre-And Post-Adult Hope Scale Survey

Directions: Read each item carefully. Using the scale shown below, please select the number that best describes YOU and put that number in the blank provided.

1. Definitely False, 2. Mostly False, 3. Somewhat False, 4. Slightly, 5. Slightly True, 6. Somewhat True, 7. Mostly True, and 8. Definitely True.

_____ 1. I can think of many ways to get out of a jam.
_____ 2. I energetically pursue my goals.
_____ 3. I feel tired most of the time.
_____ 4. There are lots of ways around any problem.
_____ 5. I am easily downed in an argument.
_____ 6. I can think of many ways to get the things in life that are important to me.
_____ 7. I worry about my health.
_____ 8. Even when others get discouraged I know I can find a way to solve the problem.
_____ 9. My past experiences have prepared me well for my future.
_____ 10. I have been pretty successful in life.
_____ 11. I usually find myself worrying about something.
_____ 12. I meet the goals that I set for myself.

Agency/Willpower (2, 9, 10, 12) **TOTAL _____**

Pathways/Waypower (1, 4, 6, 8) **TOTAL _____**

Agency and Pathways **TOTAL HOPE SCORE _____**

APPENDIX C

PRE-RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSES

Pre-Research Questionnaire Responses

Question 1:

Participants	**Responses**		**Statistics Frequency**	
1	P, D		Evangelism as Proclamation	8
2	M		Evangelism as Demonstration	4
3	A		Evangelism as Accommodation	2
5	P, D		Evangelism as Maturation	1
6	P		Evangelism as Collaboration	0
7	D		**TOTAL**	**15**
8	P			
9	P, A		**Statistics Proportions**	
10	P		Evangelism as Proclamation	53%
11	P		Evangelism as Demonstration	27%
12	P, D		Evangelism as Accommodation	13%
			Evangelism as Maturation	7%
			Evangelism as Collaboration	0%
			TOTAL	**100%**

Question 2:

Participants	**Responses**		**Statistics Frequency**	
1	P, D		Evangelism as Proclamation	6
2	P		Evangelism as Demonstration	4
3	A		Evangelism as Accommodation	1

5	C, D		Evangelism as Maturation	1
6	P		Evangelism as Collaboration	2
7	D		**TOTAL**	**14**
8	P, D			
9	P		**Statistics Proportions**	
10	M		Evangelism as Proclamation	43%
11	C		Evangelism as Demonstration	29%
12	P		Evangelism as Accommodation	7%
			Evangelism as Maturation	7%
			Evangelism as Collaboration	14%
			TOTAL	**100%**

Question 3:

Participants	**Responses**		**Statistics Frequency**	
1	Y, M		Evangelism as Proclamation	1
2	Y, M		Evangelism as Demonstration	2
3	Y, D		Evangelism as Accommodation	0
5	Y, D, M		Evangelism as Maturation	6
6	Y, P		Evangelism as Collaboration	0
7	Y, M		Did Not Answer	3
8	Y, M		**TOTAL**	**12**
9	Y, M		**Statistics Proportions**	
10	Y, DNA		Evangelism as Proclamation	8%

11	Y, DNA		Evangelism as Demonstration	17%
12	DNA, DNA		Evangelism as Accommodation	0%
			Evangelism as Maturation	50%
			Evangelism as Collaboration	0%
			Did Not Answer	25%
			Statistics Yes, No, Did Not Answer	
			Yes (10)	91%
			No (0)	0%
			Did Not Answer (1)	9%

Question 8:

Participants	**Responses**		**Statistics Frequency**	
1	A, C		Evangelism as Proclamation	3
2	N		Evangelism as Demonstration	1
3	A, C		Evangelism as Accommodation	7
5	P, C		Evangelism as Maturation	1
6	A, C, D		Evangelism as Collaboration	6
7	A		No Evangelism Present	1
8	P, C		**TOTAL**	**19**
9	A			
10	M		**Statistics Proportions**	
11	A, C		Evangelism as Proclamation	16%
12	P, A		Evangelism as Demonstration	5%

			Evangelism as Accommodation	37%
			Evangelism as Maturation	5%
			Evangelism as Collaboration	32%
			No Evangelism Present	**5%**
			TOTAL	**100%**

Question 9:

Participants	**Responses**		**Statistics Frequency**	
1			Evangelism as Proclamation	6
2			Evangelism as Demonstration	6
3			Evangelism as Accommodation	1
5			Evangelism as Maturation	2
6			Evangelism as Collaboration	0
7			Other	2
8			**TOTAL**	
9				
10			**Statistics Proportions**	
11			Evangelism as Proclamation	35%
12			Evangelism as Demonstration	35%
			Evangelism as Accommodation	6%
			Evangelism as Maturation	12%
			Evangelism as Collaboration	0%
			Other	12%

			Statistics Yes or No	
			Yes	**10**
			No	**1**

Pre-Questionnaire Responses for Research Questions 4 and 5

Question 4

Participants	**Responses**		**Statistics Frequency**	
1	R, I		Relationship with God	4
2	I, A		Knowledge of Scripture	3
3	C, R, NJ		Compassionate	5
5	C, K		Non-judgmental	2
6	E, C, R		Inclination to Evangelize	4
7	A, K		Empathetic	3
8	K		Authentic/Truthful	2
9	E, C, I		**TOTAL**	**23**
10	R, I			
11	NJ		**Statistics Proportions**	
12	C, E		Relationship with God	17%
			Knowledge of Scripture	13%
			Compassionate	22%
			Non-judgmental	9%

			Inclination to Evangelize	17%
			Empathetic	13%
			Authentic/Truthful	9%

Question 5

Participants	**Responses**		**Statistics Frequency**	
1	Y, R, I		Relationship with God	5
2	Y, I, A		Knowledge of Scripture	2
3	Y, I		Compassionate	2
5	Y, E, C, R		Non-judgmental	0
6	Y, A, K		Inclination to Evangelize	4
7	Y, A, R		Empathetic	2
8	Y, R, K		Authentic/Truthful	3
9	Y, I		**TOTAL**	**18**
10	R			
11	Y		**Statistics Proportions**	
12	Y, C, E		Relationship with God	28%
			Knowledge of Scripture	11%
			Compassionate	11%
			Non-judgmental	0%
			Inclination to Evangelize	22%
			Empathetic	11%

			Authentic/Truthful	17%
			Statistics Frequency Yes or No	
			Yes	11
			No	0
			Total	11

Pre-Questionnaire Responses for Research Question 6

Participants	**Responses**		**Statistics Frequency**	
1	DNA		Did Not Answer	1
2	R		Decreased Salvations	3
3	S		Lack of Spiritual Growth	2
5	CD		Moral Decline	1
6	R		Community decay/decline	2
7	S, O		Bad/strained relationship with the community	4
8	CD, R		Missed opportunities to evangelize	2
9	G, MD		**TOTAL**	**15**
10	G		**Statistics Proportions**	
11	O		Did Not Answer	7%
12	S, R		Decreased Salvations	20%

			Lack of Spiritual Growth	13%
			Moral Decline	7%
			Community decay/decline	13%
			Bad/strained relationship with the community	27%
			Missed opportunities to evangelize	13%
			Statistics Frequency Yes or No	
			Yes	11
			No	0
			Total	11

Pre-Questionnaire Responses for Question 7

Participants	**Responses**		**Statistics Frequency**	
1	S		Gaining Knowledge of Scripture	5
2	S		Proper Training	2
3	S, P		Engaging the Community	1
5	T		Participating in evangelism opportunities	4
6	P		Did Not Answer	2
7	S		**TOTAL**	

8	P			
9	C		**Statistics Proportions**	
10	S, P		Gaining Knowledge of Scripture	36%
11	S, P		Proper Training	14%
12	DNA		**Engaging the community.**	7%
			Participating in opportunities to evangelize	29%
			Did Not Answer	14%

POST-RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSES

Question 1:

Participants	**Responses**		**Statistics Frequency**	
1	D, M		Evangelism as Proclamation	7
2	C		Evangelism as Demonstration	2
3	A		Evangelism as Accommodation	2
5	P		Evangelism as Maturation	1
6	P, D, C		Evangelism as Collaboration	4
7	P		**TOTAL**	**16**
8	P			
9	P, A		**Statistics Proportions**	
10	P, C		Evangelism as Proclamation	44%
11	P		Evangelism as Demonstration	13%
12	C		Evangelism as Accommodation	13%

			Evangelism as Maturation	6%
			Evangelism as Collaboration	25%
			TOTAL	**100%**

Question 2:

Participants	**Responses**		**Statistics Frequency**	
1	D, A		Evangelism as Proclamation	3
2	D		Evangelism as Demonstration	5
3	A, C		Evangelism as Accommodation	0
5	P, A, C		Evangelism as Maturation	7
6	A, C		Evangelism as Collaboration	8
7	D, C		**TOTAL**	**23**
8	P, D, C			
9	A, C		**Statistics Proportions**	
10	P, D		Evangelism as Proclamation	13%
11	A, C		Evangelism as Demonstration	22%
12	A, C		Evangelism as Accommodation	30%
			Evangelism as Maturation	0%
			Evangelism as Collaboration	35%

Question 3:

Participants	**Responses**		**Statistics Frequency**	
1	Y, O		Evangelism as Proclamation	1

2	Y, O		Evangelism as Demonstration	2
3	Y, D		Evangelism as Accommodation	0
5	Y, O		Evangelism as Maturation	6
6	Y, P, D, C		Evangelism as Collaboration	0
7	Y, A, C		Did Not Answer	3
8	Y, M		**TOTAL**	**12**
9	Y, M		**Statistics Proportions**	
10	Y, O		Evangelism as Proclamation	8%
11	Y, O		Evangelism as Demonstration	17%
12	DNA, O		Evangelism as Accommodation	0%
			Evangelism as Maturation	50%
			Evangelism as Collaboration	0%
			Did Not Answer	25%
			Statistics Yes, No, Did Not Answer	
			Yes (10)	91%
			No (0)	0%
			Did Not Answer (1)	9%

Question 8:

Participants	**Responses**		**Statistics Frequency**	
1	C		Evangelism as Proclamation	3
2	C		Evangelism as Demonstration	3
3	A, C		Evangelism as Accommodation	5

5	P, C		Evangelism as Maturation	1
6	A, C		Evangelism as Collaboration	10
7	M, D		No Evangelism Present	0
8	C, A		**TOTAL**	**22**
9	C, A, D			
10	P, D, C		**Statistics Proportions**	
11	C		Evangelism as Proclamation	14%
12	P, C, A		Evangelism as Demonstration	14%
			Evangelism as Accommodation	23%
			Evangelism as Maturation	5%
			Evangelism as Collaboration	45%
			No Evangelism Present	0%

Question 9:

Participants	**Responses**		**Statistics Frequency**	
1	No		Evangelism as Proclamation	4
2	Y, P		Evangelism as Demonstration	2
3	Y, D, A		Evangelism as Accommodation	4
5	Y, P		Evangelism as Maturation	1
6	Y, P, A, C		Evangelism as Collaboration	3
7	Y, A, C		Did Not Answer	2
8	Y, M		**TOTAL**	**16**
9	Y, D, A, C			

10	Y, P		**Frequency Yes, No, Did not Answer**	
11	Y, DNA		Yes	10
12	Y, DNA		No	1
			Statistics Proportions	
			Evangelism as Proclamation	25%
			Evangelism as Demonstration	13%
			Evangelism as Accommodation	25%
			Evangelism as Maturation	6%
			Evangelism as Collaboration	19%
			Did Not Answer	12%

Post-Questionnaire Responses for Research Questions 4 and 5

Question 4

Participants	**Responses**		**Statistics Frequency**	
1	R		Relationship with God	6
2	R, K		Knowledge of Scripture	2
3	C, E		Compassionate	3
5	NJ		Non-judgmental	2
6	R, C, I		Inclination to Evangelize	5
7	I, R, K		Empathetic	2

8	R, I		Authentic/Truthful	0
9	I		Humble	**1**
10	R, I		TOTAL	21
11	NJ, C, E			
12	H		**Statistics Proportions**	
			Relationship with God	29%
			Knowledge of Scripture	10%
			Compassionate	14%
			Non-judgmental	10%
			Inclination to Evangelize	24%
			Empathetic	8%
			Authentic/Truthful	0%
			Humble	5%

Question 5

Participants	**Responses**		**Statistics Frequency**	
1	Y, R,		Relationship with God	3
2	Y, I,		Knowledge of Scripture	1
3	Y, I		Compassionate	4
5	Y, NJ, I		Non-judgmental	1
6	Y, I, R, C		Inclination to Evangelize	6
7	Y, I		Empathetic	2

8	Y, I		Authentic/Truthful	0
9	Y, C, E, H		**Humble**	**2**
10	Y, R, K			
11	Y, C, E		**Statistics Proportions**	
12	Y, C, H		Relationship with God	16%
			Knowledge of Scripture	5%
			Compassionate	21%
			Non-judgmental	5%
			Inclination to Evangelize	32%
			Empathetic	10%
			Authentic/Truthful	0%
			Humble	11%
			Statistics Frequency Yes or No	
			Yes	11
			No	0
			Total	11

Post-Questionnaire Responses for Research Question 6

Participants	**Responses**		**Statistics Frequency**	
1	R		Did Not Answer	0
2	R		Decreased Salvations	2
3	S, R		Lack of Spiritual Growth	2

5	CM		Moral Decline	1
6	R		Community decay/decline	4
7	S, CM		Bad/strained relationship with the community	4
8	CM, G		Missed opportunities to evangelize	2
9	MD, CM		**TOTAL**	**15**
10	G		**Statistics Proportions**	
11	O		Did Not Answer	0%
12	O		Decreased Salvations	13%
			Lack of Spiritual Growth	13%
			Moral Decline	7%
			Community decay/decline	27%
			Bad/strained relationship with the community	27%
			Missed opportunities to evangelize	13%
			Statistics Frequency Yes or No	
			Yes	11
			No	0
			Total	11

Post-Questionnaire Responses for Question 7

Participants	**Responses**		**Statistics Frequency**	
1	C, P		Gaining Knowledge of Scripture	2
2	C, P		Proper Training	1
3	C		Engaging the Community	6
5	C, P		Participating in evangelism opportunities	5
6	T		Did Not Answer	1
7	C, P		By being an example	1
8	S			
9	P		**Statistics Proportions**	
10	S, C, P		Gaining Knowledge of Scripture	13%
11	E		Proper Training	6%
12	DNA		**Engaging the community.**	38%
			Participating in opportunities to evangelize	31%
			Did Not Answer	6%
			By being an example	6%

APPENDIX D

PRE- AND POST-RESARCH ADULT HOPE SCALE RESPONSES

Pre- and Post-Research Adult Hope Scale Responses

Pre-Adult Hope Scale Responses

Participants	**Agency**	**Pathways**	**Total Agency and Pathway Scores**	**Hope Levels**
1	17	20	37	Low Hope
2	19	18	37	Low Hope
3	27	26	53	Moderately Hopeful
5	30	29	59	High Hope
6	32	28	60	High Hope
7	23	26	49	Moderately Hopeful
8	28	21	49	Moderately Hopeful
9	25	29	54	Moderately Hopeful
10	27	28	55	Moderately Hopeful
11	21	20	41	Hopeful
12	28	22	50	Moderately Hopeful
	Statistics Frequency		**Statistics Proportions**	
	Low Hope	2	18%	

	Hopeful	1	9%	
	Moderately Hopeful	6	55%	
	High Hope	2	18%	

Post – Adult Hope Scale Responses

Participants	**Agency**	**Pathways**	**Total Agency and Pathway Scores**	**Hope Levels**
1	17	20	37	Low Hope
2	18	14	32	Low Hope
3	26	26	52	Moderately Hopeful
5	31	29	60	High Hope
6	32	26	58	High Hope
7	28	24	52	Moderately Hopeful
8	20	20	40	Hopeful
9	27	26	53	Moderately Hopeful
10	27	28	55	Moderately Hopeful
11	18	21	39	Low Hope
12	26	24	50	Moderately Hopeful
	Statistics Frequency		**Statistics Proportions**	

	Low Hope	3	27%	
	Hopeful	1	9%	
	Moderately Hopeful	5	46%	
	High Hope	2	18%	

APPENDIX E

PROJECT CALENDAR OUTLINE

Date	Event	Procedure
September 4, 2021	Meet with context associates.	Provide overview of project and solicit support.
September 5, 2021	Announced project start	Secure commitments and set time and place of meeting.
September 9, 2021	Met with professional associates.	Provide overview of project implementation and intervention; solicit input and advice.
September 13, 2021	Projected started and administered pre-test survey and questionnaire.	Met with participants and administered pre-test survey/questionnaire.
September 15, 22, 29, and October 6.	Book study intervention on "Walking with Nehemiah: Your Community is Your Congregation."	Two chapters were review and discussed during Zoom meetings except for on October 6 where the book study concluded with the last three chapters (7-9).
October 13	Conclusion of the project with in person meeting.	Administered post-test questionnaire and survey. Journals were collected and the next steps of the project were discussed.
October 24, 2021	Hope Conference	A conference with invited speakers to speak to hope and offer practical applications for community development.

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